MUTATIONS OF HELLENISM IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Polymnia Athanassiadi

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2015 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows: 2014950745

ISBN 9781472443663 (hbk)

VARIORUM COLLECTED STUDIES SERIES CS1052

CONTENTS

Introduction ix

Acknowledgements xviii

METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

I Antiquité tardive : construction et déconstruction d'un modèle historiographique 1–26
Antiquité Tardive 14, 2006, 311–324

II The oecumenism of Iamblichus: latent knowledge and its awakening 244–250
The Journal of Roman Studies 85, 1995

A RELIGIOUS *KOINE*

III Hellenism: a theological *koine* 189–207
The Greeks beyond the Aegean: from Marseilles to Bactria, papers presented at an International Symposium held at the Onassis Cultural Center, New York, 12 October 2002, ed. V. Karageorghis. New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA), 2003

IV The gods are God: polytheistic cult and monotheistic theology in the world of late antiquity 15–31
Gott oder götter? – God or gods?, eds T Schabert and M. Riedl (Eranos, n.s. 15). Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2009

V Apamea and the Chaldaean Oracles: a holy city and a holy book 117–143
The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Brown, ed. A. Smith. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005

VI Canonizing Platonism: the fetters of Iamblichus 129–141
Canon and Canonicity: the Formation and Use of Scripture, ed. E. Thomassen. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010

VII The creation of orthodoxy in Neoplatonism 271–291
Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World, Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin, eds G. Clark and T. Rajak. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

VIII A contribution to Mithraic theology: the Emperor Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* 360–371
The Journal of Theological Studies, n.s. 28, 1977

IX Le traitement du mythe : de l'empereur Julien à Proclus 63–76
Pensée grecque et sagesse d'Orient, Hommage à Michel Tardieu, eds M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, J.-D. Dubois, C. Jullien and F. Jullien (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses 142). Turnhout: Brepols, 2009

PROPHECY AND REVELATION

X Philosophers and oracles: shifts of authority in late paganism 45–62
Byzantion 62 (Hommage à la mémoire de Charles Delvoye), 1992

XI The fate of oracles in late antiquity: Didyma and Delphi 271–278
Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society 15 (1989–90), 1991

XII Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: the testimony of Iamblichus 115–130
The Journal of Roman Studies 83, 1993

XIII The Chaldaean Oracles: theology and theurgy 149–183
Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity, eds P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999

XIV Byzantine commentators on the Chaldaean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon 237–252
Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources, ed. K. Ierodiakonou. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002

ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ

XV Ascent to heroic or divine status in late antiquity: continuities and transformations 1–5
Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum (Thescra), vol. 2, Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2004, 212–214

XVI The divine man of late Hellenism: a sociable and popular figure 13–27
Divine Men and Women in the History and Society of Late Hellenism, eds M. Dzielska and K. Twardowska. Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2013

XVII Julian the Theurgist: man or myth? 193–208
Die Chaldaeischen Orakel: Kontext – Interpretation – Rezeption, eds H. Seng and M. Tardieu. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011

DISSIDENCE AND PERSECUTION

XVIII Persecution and response in late paganism: the evidence of Damascius 1–29
The Journal of Hellenic Studies 113, 1993

XIX Who was Count Zosimus? 350–357
Damascius, The Philosophical History: Text with Translation and Notes, ed. P. Athanassiadi. Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999

XX Christians and others: the conversion ethos in late antiquity 23–47
Also appearing in Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond, eds A. Papaconstantinou, N. McLynn and D.L. Schwartz. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015

ENVOI

XXI From polis to Theoupolis: school syllabuses and teaching methods in late antiquity 9–14
Thymiama, in memory of Laskarina Bouras, vol. 1. Athens: Benaki Museum, 1994

Index 1–8

This volume contains xviii + 374 pages

Publisher's Note

The articles in this volume, as in all others in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, have not been given a new, continuous pagination. In order to avoid confusion, and to facilitate their use where these same studies have been referred to elsewhere, the original page numbers have been maintained wherever possible. Articles I and XV have necessarily been reset with a new pagination.

Each article has been given a Roman number in order of appearance, as listed in the Contents. This number is repeated on each page and is quoted in the index entries.

Author's Note

As is to be expected in a body of work on related subjects by the same author, repetitions occur, and in the few places where this was possible I have excised them. I have also brought up to date certain footnotes where practical, but otherwise the volume reproduces the original publications with only the odd typographical correction. To avoid contradictions, I have taken particular care to exclude from the volume any papers on subjects about which I have had a change of mind. The index of personal names, toponyms and concepts at the end aims to assist the reader to navigate through the volume, while also indicating connections between its various units.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-one articles in this volume explore a specific theme within a general context: how the changing ethos of Hellenism reflects the overall transition of late antique society from an anthropocentric to a theocentric mentality. Emerging from a number of independent archives created over a period of more than thirty years, these papers seemed effortlessly to arrange themselves into the thematic groups which are epitomized in the headings of the table of contents. It was as if the pieces of an unintended jigsaw puzzle were falling into place to allow a meaningful whole to appear. Seeking a name for the picture that had so unexpectedly emerged, I came up with the title of the volume, each of whose elements however is in need of further clarification. Let me begin with the most controversial of the three concepts, that of Late Antiquity, a new historiographical paradigm which has recently become a celebrity issue.

Defining Late Antiquity

Extending further and further into the Middle Ages, the boundaries of 'late antiquity' have come to reach the year 1000.[1] This construct of the postmodern mind is 'the long late antiquity',[2] whose imperialistic forays into new chronological, geographical and epistemological fields are traced in the article which introduces this collection, 'Antiquité tardive : construction et déconstruction d'un modèle historiographique' (I). But whereas the terminal date of late antiquity is ever being moved forward, no attempt has as yet been made to push back its genesis. Quite the contrary! In an obvious effort to keep classicists and their methodologies out of the consecrated space, the starting post of late antiquity has been advancing with remarkable celerity. While in his seminal book *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), Peter Brown uses the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180) as the starting line for the period, in the volume which attempts to codify the discipline and the approaches to it (1999), he and his co-authors firmly set its beginnings in the year 250 A.D.[3] Even more daringly, the title page of the international review *Antiquité Tardive*

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[1] See G. Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused*, Princeton 2014.

[2] Formula established by Averil Cameron: 'The "long" late antiquity: a late twentieth-century model' in T.P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress*, Oxford 2002 (British Academy Centenary Series), 165–91.

[3] G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, Cambridge MA 1999.

provides the year 400 as a birthdate for the period. Yet, to the mind of the present writer, it is not possible to detach late antiquity from its Hellenistic roots without rendering unintelligible precisely those developments which were decisive in its making. If pushed to produce a label, I would therefore postulate, instead of a 'long late antiquity', a 'long Hellenistic age', with varying beginnings and ends according to the themes treated.[4]

As I was trying to understand the logic of this arbitrary moving away from origins, I was struck by the realization that the concept of late antiquity is a Western invention – a hermeneutical model for the study of the 'Late(r) Roman Empire' devised by Western historians with reference to the West. Its architects conceived it with the intention of freeing a period which coincides with the birth of Europe from the bad press with which the Enlightenment had loaded it. The verdict of Gibbon, who memorably viewed the Christianization of Rome as 'the triumph of barbarism and religion', had to be refuted and reversed, or at least, qualified. For this purpose, as well as changing the title of its object of research – from 'late Roman' or '*Bas empire*' to 'late antique' – the new paradigm introduced a whole arsenal of terms and concepts: 'decline and fall' gave way to 'change and continuity', the politically incorrect 'age of barbarism' was replaced by the positive 'birth of Europe' or even 'ethnogenesis', while the study of 'Religion' with a capital 'R', understood as being coterminous with Christianity, was overtaken by that of 'religious change' and/or 'religions' in the plural, which implies the detached observation of the religious phenomenon in its varied expressions within and without the Empire.[5] In this new perspective the rise of the religious is seen as a purely social phenomenon, and analyzed as such with the aid of the anthropologist's tools; the emphasis is nowadays on the triumph of emotions, on ritual and theatricality and on social networking, while the universal passion for theological debate which animated the life of late antique men and women is attributed to the era's taste for rhetoric, as shaped by an archaizing educational ethos.[6] What the essays in this volume attempt to show with reference to Hellenism is that late antiquity was indeed *an age of intense spiritual searching*, when all

[4] See in this connection P. Athanassiadi, 'From Man to God or the mutation of a culture (300 B.C. – A.D. 762)' in A. Drandaki *et al.*, *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, Exh. Cat., Athens 2013, 28–43.

[5] For 'religious change' see Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395–600*, 2nd edition, London 2012, 11. *Religions of Rome* is the title of an influential textbook by M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, Cambridge 1998.

[6] Cameron, *op.cit.* (n. 5), 9: 'the recognition of the great importance of rhetoric in all forms in the interpretation of late antique writing' is praised in the context of the setting out of the guidelines for the reading of a variety of sources as 'one of the major advances' in late antique scholarship during the last twenty years; elsewhere, the same author comments with reference to K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. A Symposium* (New York 1980), 'Late antiquity used to be seen unproblematically as a time of increased spirituality', (n. 5), 128.

aspects of the religious phenomenon, from ritual to theology and from a turning inwards to a vocation for the ascetic life were passionately pursued by people of all social strata and intellectual levels.

Both Henri-Irénée Marrou and Peter Brown – the two gurus of late antique studies – have constructed their narrative of late antique change around the spread of Christianity, with St Augustine as their edifice's foundation stone.[7] An emblematic figure for Western life and thought, the Bishop of Hippo has (mercifully) exercised remarkably little influence on the society and culture of the East. Yet once launched, the hermeneutical model of a *late* late antiquity, emancipated from the cultural influence of the Hellenistic East and centred on Augustine, was extended to explain developments in the *Pars Orientalis* of the Roman Empire.[8] The spontaneous reaction of Byzantinists was to ignore the new construct and the methodologies it carried, and determinately stick to their traditional periodisation into an early, middle and late Empire. Relying on the evidence of their sources, they continued to view the Hellenistic heritage as the all-important force in the shaping of Byzantium, seeing that, in its linguistic, intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic hypostasis, the Hellenistic past was dynamically present in every manifestation of life in the Christian Empire, though not infrequently as the condemned party and the reproved interlocutor in the official discourse.[9]

The Long Hellenistic Age

In introducing the collection of essays *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (1999), Michael Frede and the present author argued for a periodisation beginning

[7] In his first collection of articles with the telling title *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, London 1972, Peter Brown explains why he sees Augustine as such a representative figure for the era (esp. 9–11).

[8] It is only fair to note that in his *Retractatio* to *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (1938), published in 1949, Marrou shows himself fully conscious of the fact that his model of *fin de culture* is applicable only to the West, by contrast with developments in the Eastern Empire which benefited from a *long été – presque millénaire, – où s'épanouit cette civilisation hellénistique, puis romaine*, 685. His final remarks (*Retractatio* XIX, XX, 690–702), concerning the cultural 'pseudomorphosis' of the *Bas Empire* – a period on which he confers historiographical autonomy under the name of Theopolis – are particularly perceptive.

[9] In a series of books and articles, whose subjects range from Procopius to Psellos, Anthony Kaldellis has shown how vibrant – if often underground – was the Hellenistic presence in Byzantium. With reference to Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Plato and Theodoret: the Christian Appropriation of Platonic Philosophy and the Hellenic Intellectual Resistance*, Cambridge 2008) and Pletho (*Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, Cambridge 2011), Niketas Siniossoglou has analysed the Byzantine strategies of appropriation vis-à-vis the cultural values of Hellenism. For a reasoned response to the eccentric claim by Dame Averil Cameron (*Byzantine matters* (Princeton 2014), 55) that the views of Kaldellis, Siniossoglou and the present writer illustrate 'the dilemmas faced by Greek historians in writing about Byzantium', see Kaldellis' review in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 7.2 (2014 Fall), 376-8.

around the year 125 B.C., justifying this choice in the following terms: 'To the historian of religion and philosophy in the eastern Mediterranean, the end of the second century BC stands out as a natural watershed: the demise of the traditional Hellenistic schools, the Pythagorean revival, and the impetus which animated the 'oriental cults', shaping them into systematic oecumenical messages, are all phenomena which indicate a break with the Hellenistic past and point to new beginnings' (p. 3). At stake in that volume was the issue of monotheism, and accordingly we took as a notional beginning of late antiquity that point in time when its principal features seemed to us to coalesce. A different emphasis would naturally entail a different starting point, since periodisation does not constitute an absolute, but is entirely dependent on the phenomenon studied. It is essential to remember in this connection that there are many late antiquities with mutually asynchronous beginnings and ends.

Most of the trends with which the present volume deals have their origin in the creation of the Hellenistic *oecumene*, and we may therefore postulate a date around 300 B.C. as the logical starting point for their discussion. In this context I would emphasise four factors: (1) the metamorphosis of the Attic dialect into a global linguistic instrument, through which a *koine* would eventually emerge to articulate the theological discourse of the period; (2) the confluence of the spiritual traditions of East and West, whose significance in the making of late antiquity can hardly be overemphasized, despite strenuous recent efforts to the contrary;[10] (3) the transition from orality to literacy, which was to bring about the creation of textual communities with their culture of holy scriptures and exegesis; and (4) the formation of literary and artistic canons and the scholastic ethos to which they gave birth. All these trends (with their various modalities), which shaped the late antique cultural milieu, originated in the Hellenistic *oecumene*. Some were methodically prepared in its great cosmopolitan centres, such as Pergamon and Alexandria, but, for the most part, they were spontaneous creations of its global climate.

Hellenisms

With Hellenism's migration to the East, Greek replaced Aramaic as the lingua franca of the Greater Eastern Mediterranean. As a result a consensus regarding correct linguistic usage was needed, and in this context the term Ἑλληνισμός obtained its primary meaning of the use of a Greek free from barbarisms and

[10] Such a truism has to be repeated in view of the enthusiasm with which the spiritual influence of the Orient in the making of Roman paganism is being deconstructed: see most recently L. Bricault and C. Bonnet (eds), *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, *RGRW* 177, Leiden 2013, where however the chapter 'La philosophisation du religieux', 41–83, by Constantinos Macris and the present author, goes against the general trend of the volume.

solecisms. But the new construct bore other connotations as well, which varied according to the milieu within which it operated: traditionalist Jews, for example, viewed Greek culture in competitive, if not hostile, terms, and for them Ἑλληνισμός implied the loss by a Jew of his ethnic and religious identity through the voluntary adoption of the Greek way of life.[11] This specific usage points to a more general trend in a world in which the antithesis between Greek and barbarian had ceased to operate on racial grounds and had adopted the Isocratic vision of culture as the criterion of differentiation.[12] Yet, over the course of time, immigrant Hellenism came less and less to consist in what Isocrates would have recognized as 'the paideia of the Greeks'.

In the creation of this new, ever-evolving product the role of 'the Orient' proved catalytic,[13] while the one element which remained stable throughout its long and diverse life was the exclusive use of Greek as its instrument of expression. But even this became subject to challenge: authors from an ethnic periphery, whose main if not sole linguistic and methodological tool was Ἑλληνισμός, would pronounce it unfit to convey the full depth of the native cultures it purported to represent.[14] The paradox that the tools of the hegemonic culture are themselves used to question its technical adequacy in grasping the spirit of the messages it receives from a variety of local centres was no mere rhetorical device: it was an indication of the complexity and fluidity, and also of the vigilance, inventiveness and adaptability of a culture continuously beset by challenges which it resolved with only partial success. Notable players in this game, as essay XIV points out, are Michael Psellos in the eleventh century and George Gemistos Plethon in the fifteenth, who embody, each in his own way, aspects of a renewed, even combative, Hellenism in an inhospitable milieu.

The majority of the contributions to the volume, however, focus on the period between the second and the sixth centuries A.D. It was at this time that a theological *koine* was meticulously systematized in order to exploit, under the sign of divine revelation, the philosophical arsenal of an evolving tradition reaching back to Archaic Greece. 'Hellenism: a theological *koine*' (III) and 'The gods are

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[11] *II Macc.* 4:13.

[12] For the stock quotation, Isocrates, *Paneg.* 50.

[13] Theme explored by A. Momigliano in *Alien Wisdom: the Limits of Hellenization*, Cambridge 1975; his conclusions, however, on the importance of the East in the final synthesis are somewhat exaggerated. For a more balanced view, see M. Avi-Yonah, *Hellenism and the East: Contacts and Interrelations from Alexander to the Roman Conquest*, Jerusalem 1978 (a posthumous, inadequately edited work). W. Ball's analysis in *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London 2000, displays a somewhat excessive enthusiasm for the Eastern contribution to the Roman cultural paradigm; the book is an answer to F. Millar's, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC–AD 337*, Cambridge MA. 1993.

[14] [Hermes Trismegistus] XVI 2 Nock; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 192, 19–27 Saffrey/Segonds = 259, 6–14 Parthey.

God: polytheistic cult and monotheistic theology in the world of late antiquity' (IV) are attempts at analysing aspects of this religious idiom within the general intellectual climate of a spiritually and devotionally innovative period.[15] Both essays call attention to the widespread and popular character of Hellenism, with the former laying particular emphasis on its use of the image in the visual and representational arts, and the latter dwelling on ritual praxis and more specifically on the centrality of divine epiphanies.

The term Hellenism as a description of this multiform theological *koine* was given currency in the second century A.D. by the Christian apologists who recognized in it a dangerous rival to their own revelatory creed. A dynamic response to this Christian provocation came in the fourth century, when the Emperor Julian adopted 'Hellenism' as an umbrella term for his political, social, intellectual and spiritual agenda. The main inspiration behind Julian's programme was the figure of Iamblichus of Apamea (240s – c. 325), to whose remodelling of the pagan Weltanschauung several papers are devoted. 'The oecumenism of Iamblichus: latent knowledge and its awakening' (II) is a review article which identifies the areas to be researched and suggests methodologies of approach. 'Apamea and the *Chaldaean Oracles*: a holy city and a holy book' (V), 'Canonising Platonism: the fetters of Iamblichus'(VI), and 'The creation of orthodoxy in Neoplatonism' (VII) focus, as their titles suggest, on the methods by which Iamblichus succeeded in transforming Hellenism into a typically late antique religious phenomenon centred around the issues of textuality and holy scripture, canonicity and exclusion, prophecy and tradition, truth and error, holiness and authority, grace and salvation, while launching in the process an orthodox reading for the entirety of the Greek philosophical heritage. The reason why Iamblichus looms so large in the history of religious thought and practice is not just that he detected and promoted those trends in the sociology of Hellenism which sharpened its contemporary relevance, but also, as I have attempted to show in two recent publications on his reception, the strong influence he exerted on the shaping of mystical Islam.[16]

As regards the Emperor Julian, whose model of the ideal priest in the context of his clerical reorganization of paganism was based on the Iamblichan theurgist,[17] two essays in the volume underline his own original contribution to the cause

[15] For a critical overview of this theme, see Athanassiadi in *Catholic Historical Review* 98.3 (2012), 524–8.

[16] 'De Jamblique à Damascius: la dimension syrienne du platonisme' in D. Lauritzen and M. Tardieu (eds), *Le voyage des légendes : Hommages à Pierre Chuvin*, Paris 2013, 363–82 ; 'Un calife avant la lettre : l'empereur Julien et son hellénisme' in M.A. Amir-Moezzi and D. De Smet (eds), *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam*. Paris 2014, 17–45.

[17] See Athanassiadi, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd ed., London 1992 (repr. 2014), 181–91.

of Hellenism: 'A contribution to Mithraic theology: the Emperor Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*' (VIII) is a study on Julian's solar theology which was dictated as much by religious fervour as by political consideration; an acknowledged Mithraist, Julian combines in his exegesis Iamblichus' interpretation of Chaldaean solar worship with teachings from the most 'locative' of the Roman mystery cults.[18] By contrast, 'Le traitement du mythe : de l'empereur Julien à Proclus' (IX) focuses on the hermeneutical strategies of Julian and Proclus in their respective struggle to include popular mythology in the edifice of pagan theology.

The issues of prophecy and revelation in the context of late antique paganism and their reception in Byzantium are addressed in five studies. 'Philosophers and oracles: shifts of authority in late paganism' (X) is an attempt at interpreting the shift of the *Sitz-in-Leben* of divination from shrine to individual over a relatively short period, from the second to the fourth centuries. 'The fate of oracles in late antiquity: Didyma and Delphi' (XI) is a case-study largely based on archaeological and epigraphic material. 'Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: the testimony of Iamblichus' (XII) deals with Iamblichus' theoretical framework for the integration – and the rejection – of contemporary divinatory practices in a world which was fast moving towards their criminalisation. 'The *Chaldaean Oracles*: theology and theurgy' (XIII) offers an analysis of this new revelatory genre of oracular wisdom which presaged the birth of the Koran and provided the Neoplatonic religion with a holy book in harmony with contemporary trends. Within the context of this general development, the essay advocates a new editorial methodology, based on reception, for the collection of the oracular fragments and their testimonies. Finally, 'Byzantine commentators on the Chaldaean Oracles: Psellos and Pletho' (XIV) is a comparative study on the reception of the 'Bible' of the Neoplatonists by two important Byzantine philosophers.

The rise of the divine man (θεῖος ἀνήρ) is a central theme of most of the essays in the volume. As prophet and teacher, spiritual guide and erudite commentator, this agent of sanctity is a familiar figure in late antique paganism and one who, when viewed against the background of the contemporary Christian and Rabbinic traditions, illustrates in vivid colours the processes of osmosis, interaction and acculturation. More specifically, 'Ascent to heroic or divine status in late antiquity: continuities and transformations' (XV) is a general survey of the epigraphic, literary and archaeological evidence for cultic practices regarding the veneration of pagan saints in late antiquity, with particular emphasis on the visual material. Conversely, 'The divine man of late Hellenism: a sociable and popular figure' (XVI) concentrates on the social persona and role of the divine man, as conceived by Iamblichus and incarnated by a number of his pupils and above all by the Emperor Julian's ideal of the 'philanthropic priest'. Finally, 'Julian the Theurgist:

[18] 'Locative' (as opposed to 'Utopian') is a term introduced by J.Z. Smith to describe a this-worldly soteriological concern.

man or myth?' (XVII) focuses on the history of the man whom the Neoplatonists recognised as the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and traces the itinerary of his legend among friends and foes.

It is suggested or explicitly argued in a number of these essays that intolerant attitudes, which form a characteristic trait of monotheisms, were not the exclusive preserve of Christianity (as the Enlightenment tradition would insist), but were progressively espoused by pagan philosophers and holy men. I have described the rise of intolerance in the world of late antiquity –a theme whose present day relevance can hardly be overemphasised – in two recent monographs: *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif : de Numénius à Damascius* (Les Belles Lettres 2006) traces the birth and growth of a mentality of exclusion among the authoritative commentators of Plato over a period of four centuries, while *Vers la pensée unique : la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Les Belles Lettres 2010) follows the gradual development over the same period of imperial policies whose objective was the homogenisation of behaviours and consciences in the Empire at large. In this connection I have argued that the watershed, which is usually associated with 'the Constantinian revolution', should in fact be placed many decades earlier, with the reign of Decius (249–251) representing a turning point in the social and intellectual history of late antiquity; for what is normally described as the first systematic persecution of the Christians was nothing less than the demand imposed by an autocrat that *all* the citizens of his universal empire should comply, under penalty of death, with the cultic rules of the state religion. As is shown by the articles in this section, the claim to a monopoly of a revealed truth was universal in the textual communities of late antiquity, which, spreading as they did across the full breadth of the Greater Mediterranean, remodelled its intellectual and spiritual landscape.

In this climate the emergence of Christianity as the state religion inevitably meant that all heterodoxies – whether within or without its own doctrinal framework – would sooner or later be formally stamped with the mark of illegality. The themes of dissidence and persecution loom large in two papers which trace the increasing marginalisation of the Neoplatonists in a world into which, potentially, they could hardly have been more harmoniously integrated: 'Persecution and response in late paganism: the evidence of Damascius' (XVIII) evokes a climate of unease as it follows, across the entire spectrum of the Mediterranean, the progressive spread of terrorising mentalities and behaviour patterns, while 'Who was Count Zosimus?' (XIX) is an attempt at reconstructing the milieu that formed the author of *The New History* and his historiographical orthodoxy.

A survey of the prosopography of the literary and philosophical circles active in Alexandria in the late fifth century helps us to understand how possible – indeed how easy – it was for a thinking minority to find ways of articulating its

opposition to the official discourse – in other words to exert its right to that most fundamental of late antique concepts: *parrhesia* – freedom of speech. This is the context to which the final paper in this section belongs. By following various individual destinies and inquiring into their motives as they publicly declare the profession of their chosen faith, 'Christians and others: the conversion ethos in late antiquity' (XX) testifies to Hellenism's continuing pertinence as a religious choice in the Christian Empire.

Mutations

The remaining concept mentioned in the title, 'mutation', signifies in the vocabulary of biologists the kind of gradual change which results in the production of a new species. This is indeed what the essays assembled here attempt to show: that in the course of the millennium, which for the purposes of this volume I define as 'the long Hellenistic age', the many, varied and far from synchronous transformations in the social and intellectual fabric of the Empire resulted in a new civilisational paradigm. By the year 600 the anthropocentric culture of the Hellenistic age had given way to a societal model whose main elements were constructed *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. In this qualitative metamorphosis of the Mediterranean landscape, Hellenism played the role of active agent. What is more, if 'decontextualised', Hellenism tells by itself the story of the civilisational transformation, since the phases of its development unfold according to the general pattern.

It is all too easy to view the Christianisation of the Greater Mediterranean as the one revolutionary event which changed the face of the Roman Empire in late antiquity – the anatomist of the period will see in the triumph of Christianity only the tip of the iceberg and will realize the need to look deeper in order to identify the variety of forces whose interaction resulted in the formation of the new society.[19] Among them he is sure to discover Hellenism.

The overall civilisational mutation which prepared the ground for the reception of Islam as metaphysical world-view, political theology and societal model, is aptly mirrored in the changing ethos of Greek education and culture – *paideia*. 'From *polis* to *Theoupolis*: school syllabuses and teaching methods in late antiquity' (XXI), a brief essay with a telling title, written as long ago as the early nineties, is a fitting conclusion for the volume as it represents a field worth further exploration, a task which I hope to undertake in a future book.

POLYMNIA ATHANASSIADI

Aegina, September 2014

[19] Traditions change interactively as a result of osmosis, as they are affected by the trends which redefine the ethos of the age. To ignore this and attribute to one culture only the hegemonic role in overall societal change is an error: cf. Guy Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice*, Paris 2005, where the author appropriates to Judaism all the major changes in the religious mode of late antiquity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For permission to reprint articles which first appeared in their publications, I thank: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA), New York (III); Benaki Museum, Athens (XXI); Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (II, XII); Christian Archaeological Society, Athens (XI); Classical Press of Wales, Swansea (V); Jagiellonian University Press, Krakow (XVI); Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen (VI); Oxford University Press, Oxford (VII, VIII, XIII, XIV); Peeters Publishers, Leuven (X); Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, London (XVIII); Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, Heidelberg (XVII); and Verlag Königshausen & Neuman, Würzburg (IV). Papers I and XV were reset, and payment for the rights of reproduction for Paper IX was made to Brepols Publishers, Turnhout.

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I

Antiquité tardive : construction et déconstruction d'un modèle historiographique*

Late Antiquity: Construction and Deconstruction of a Historiographical Model

Summary

The concept of Late Antiquity as an autonomous historical period was launched in the 1970s and has been gaining ground ever since. The chronological, geographical and epistemological expansion of its boundaries goes hand in hand with an optimistic historical vision: the era which was previously known as "an age of anxiety" has become "an age of ambition". Its hero is the holy man – a new sociological type whose power in this world and in the next endows the society from which he emerges with a remarkable dynamism.

Born of a reaction to the historiographical model of crisis and decline, which corresponds to the tripartite periodisation "Antiquity, Middle Ages, Modern Times", the postmodern concept of a long, autonomous, dynamic and multi-cultural Late Antiquity is now in its turn the subject of a reaction. The new millennium has seen the beginnings of a return to the study of the political, administrative and economic structures of the end of the ancient world and, perhaps inevitably, to a more traditional and therefore more sombre view of this period.

After analysing the main stages in the debate between these two fundamental positions and evoking its ideological background, the article argues for a Late Antiquity which is autonomous but fluid – an interval between two entities, Antiquity and the Middle Ages, during which a society centred on Man mutated into one constituted for the greater glory of God. It further suggests that the explanation as to how an anthropocentric culture was transformed into a theocracy should be sought in the area of religion with all its parameters (social, psychological and especially theological), and that the interpretative tool for such an analysis should be the concept of violence, both physical and intellectual.

* Une première version de cet article fut présentée au Collège de France en juin 2006, en guise d'introduction à une série des conférences [déjà publiées sous le titre *Vers la pensée unique: la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2010]. Mes plus vifs remerciements vont à Constantin Macris qui a fait une lecture critique de l'avant-dernière version de ce texte.

I Définitions

Qu'est-ce que l'Antiquité tardive ? Quelle est sa nature, son étendue, sa durée ? Questions brûlantes au cœur d'un des débats contemporains les plus animés. On remarque tout d'abord que l'on est en face de deux termes qui se définissent réciproquement. Nous avons affaire à une antiquité de l'arrière saison, cela est indiscutable. Mais de quelle antiquité s'agit-il ? On est habitué à des locutions du type « Antiquité grecque », « Antiquité orientale », « Antiquité chrétienne ». Or, l'absence d'un adjectif déterminant le caractère culturel et, partant, chronologique de notre antiquité nous plonge dans la perplexité. Et l'on se demande : est-ce par excès de confiance ou bien par pur provincialisme qu'ont été motivés les inspirateurs d'une formule aussi elliptique ? Envisageaient-ils l'antiquité dans sa totalité ou bien prenaient-ils pour l'oecumène entière un infime coin de la terre avec ses fourmis et ses grenouilles groupés à l'entour d'une eau stagnante, pour reprendre la célèbre image dont se sert Socrate pour décrire la Méditerranée[1] ?

Une réponse passablement juste oscillerait entre ces deux bornes. Notre antiquité est celle de l'Empire romain, de l'*Orbis romanus*, qu'Eusèbe de Césarée désignera comme ἡ καθ'ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένη[2] ; c'est la contrée qui, en termes braudeliens, coïncide avec la Plus Grande Méditerranée. Il s'agit bien de cette structure politique qui constitue l'unique exception à la règle formulée par Fernand Braudel, selon laquelle dominer la Méditerranée d'un bout à l'autre avec toutes ses péninsules – celles de l'Europe, de l'Afrique et de l'Asie – revient à une impossibilité[3]. Or Rome est parvenue à défier les lois de la géographie pour une durée de quelque cinq siècles, du Ier au Ve. Mais, avant de nous occuper des confins chronologiques de notre période, signalons que, lorsqu'on prononce aujourd'hui le syntagme lexical « Antiquité tardive », on ne pense pas exclusivement à l'entité politique qu'est l'empire romain. On envisage aussi l'*Autre*, ou plutôt *les Autres*, Perses et Arabes, Berbères et Barbares du Nord, qui, par leur hostilité ou par leur désir d'intégration, par leur résistance ou par leur assentiment, disent (ou bien immolent) leur différence face à l'œcuménisme romain. La notion de « l'Antiquité tardive » présuppose donc une vision globalisée du monde.

De façon vague et imprécise, il est vrai, nous avons indiqué les confins géographiques de l'Antiquité tardive, confins vagues eux aussi et même protéiformes. Notre définition, avec son accent sur la périphérie, reste pourtant inutile tant qu'on ne lui attribue pas des limites temporelles. Notre arrière saison, quand commence-t-elle et jusqu'où s'étend-elle ? Question dont l'enjeu n'a d'égal que la difficulté d'y répondre, puisqu'elle se situe à l'épicentre des débats savants des dernières années entre Anciens et Modernes (ou plutôt entre Postmodernes et Post-postmodernes).

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1 Pour la référence, Platon, *Phédon* 109B.

2 *Histoire ecclésiastique* VII 31, 2.

3 *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1990 (9e éd.), p. 196.

Mais aussi question qui est en rapport direct avec le problème de l'autonomie ou non de l'Antiquité tardive en tant que période historique.

Pour mieux aborder cette double difficulté, essayons de nous représenter la situation à laquelle on réagissait en créant cette zone tampon entre l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge. Aussitôt nous nous rendons compte qu'avant même de nous lancer dans une pareille aventure, un autre problème surgit : nous sommes arrêtés sur nos pas par le caractère dépendant du terme « Moyen Âge ». Qu'est ce que c'est que le *Moyen* Âge lui-même, sinon un intermédiaire entre deux étants – l'Antiquité et les Temps Modernes ? Pourtant nous sommes à ce point accoutumés à cette expression, reprise dans toutes les langues – Mittelalter, Middle Ages, Medioevo –, qu'en la prononçant nous oublions la relativité inhérente à l'adjectif « moyen »[4].

En gardant toujours la conscience de l'artificialité de la période pendant laquelle naissent et s'autodéfinissent les langues, les cultures et, finalement, les entités politiques qui devaient aboutir aux états nationaux de l'Europe, signalons que, lorsqu'on inventait l'Antiquité tardive l'objectif n'était autre que de se libérer des entraves d'une périodisation imposée aux programmes scolaires par des idéologies nationales ou religieuses et de secouer en même temps les bases d'une philosophie de l'Histoire calquée sur le modèle biologique de la naissance, maturité, vieillesse et mort des civilisations, dont Spengler est le plus célèbre représentant[5]. En abandonnant la notion du progrès cyclique pour celle du progrès linéaire, on adhérait à un modèle optimiste (ou du moins non déterministe) de l'évolution historique, un modèle qui ne se pliait pas au schéma de la grandeur et de la décadence des civilisations. Ainsi, le concept de la fin d'un empire, ou d'une ère, était remplacé par celui de sa survie, sa transformation ou – à la rigueur – sa mutation.

C'est dans ce contexte qu'on doit souligner l'apport de Fernand Braudel aux études historiques. En mettant l'accent sur l'asynchronie des changements produits dans une société donnée – autrement dit sur l'absence de simultanéité dans l'évolution de ses structures – la notion braudelienne de la longue durée contribuait puissamment à la déconstruction du modèle du déclin et de la chute, en vogue pour l'empire romain depuis Montesquieu, qui publia ses *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* en 1734, et surtout Gibbon, dont le magistral *History of the decline and fall of the Roman empire* devait paraître entre 1776 et 1788.

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[4] Je rappelle, dans le cadre de la présente discussion, qu'en grec le terme μεσαίων est normalement réservé à l'Occident, tandis que pour désigner la *Pars Orientalis* de l'Empire romain,depuis la fondation jusqu'à la chute de Constantinople on se sert du terme « Byzance » tout court, en ayant toutefois recours à des subdivisions du type « protobyzantin », « médiobyzantin » et « byzantin tardif » pour rendre les différentes périodes de la civilisation byzantine. Inutile de signaler le caractère fortement idéologique de cet emploi, qui, en se référant à une culture majoritairement « hellénique », esquive les connotations péjoratives attachées au terme « médiéval ».

[5] Pour Spengler, dont le principal ouvrage *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* parut entre 1918 et 1922, comme un des fondateurs du concept de l'Antiquité tardive, voir W. Liebeschuetz, « The birth of late antiquity », *Antiquité Tardive* 12 (2004), p. 256–7.

C'est ainsi qu'à la rigidité du schéma tripartite « Antiquité – Moyen-Âge – Temps Modernes », on a opposé la continuité et la fluidité de l'histoire, la longue durée des phénomènes culturels et sociaux, les rythmes lents des mutations complexes et forcément interdépendantes, jusqu'à ce qu'on soit arrivé – suprême ironie ! – à confectionner une période historique aussi artificielle que celles de l'historiographie scolaire qu'on voulait abolir.

II Histoire d'une controverse

La thèse

La construction d'une Antiquité tardive qui allait en s'élargissant dans l'espace et dans le temps fut une démarche collective et graduelle. S'il fallait pourtant nommer un seul individu comme inspirateur et, partant, architecte de cette nouvelle discipline avec son bagage méthodologique, celui-ci serait incontestablement le savant anglo-irlandais Peter Brown. Son *World of late antiquity: from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*, paru en 1971[6], a entraîné une révolution dans notre manière de voir le Bas-Empire, du fait, entre autres, que ce livre de modestes dimensions ne se limite pas à un texte continu ; il est parsemé de cent trente illustrations qui forcent le lecteur à regarder les personnages de la pièce et leur espace à travers les lunettes dispensées par des légendes généreuses et osées qui détournent l'image de son contexte d'origine pour l'intégrer dans un monde plus accueillant et proche au lecteur.

Livre sans structure, qui va à l'encontre des lois de la logique et de l'habitude, le *Monde de l'Antiquité tardive* ouvrait de nouvelles pistes à l'imagination et à la pensée, excitait la curiosité et invitait à rêver. Comme dira Peter Brown lui-même vingt-cinq ans après la parution de son ouvrage : « en le relisant je suis frappé par la violence de la « charge » électrique qui le parcourt, générée par la ruée soudaine de nouvelles idées, de nouveaux problèmes et de nouvelles méthodes dans les années où il fut écrit. Le livre lui-même marqua pour moi un nouveau départ. »[7] En effet, de tous les travaux de Peter Brown c'est celui qui traduit le plus fidèlement son style oral – peut-être seulement son style oral de l'époque ; c'est un livre d'une fougueuse spontanéité, un livre de l'oralité, je dirais même, un livre du divan de l'analyste. Pour justifier un tel aphorisme, je ne peux mieux faire que de reculer de quelques décennies et, me situant à peu près au moment de la parution du livre, partager avec le lecteur un souvenir personnel des plus vifs. C'était justement en septembre 1972 que j'arrivais à Oxford, pour assister – participer même – à cette psychose collective qu'engendraient les conférences du maître à All Souls. Assis, littéralement à ses pieds, dans une salle pleine à craquer, nous absorbions chaque mot de deux cycles interdépendants de

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[6] Londres, 1971 (réimpr. *The World of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150–750*, Londres 1997).

[7] *Symbolae Osloenses* 72, 1997 [=SO 72], p. 16.

leçons sur « Byzance et les Sassanides » et « la Société et le Surnaturel de Marc Aurèle à Muhammad ». Pourtant, malgré l'extrême attention que je vouais à son discours, prendre des notes de quelque utilité pratique (ou même théorique) ou résumer après coup les points cardinaux du cours s'avérait une tâche impossible.

Aussi fondamental que ce livre torrentiel, est l'article sur le rôle du saint chrétien dans la société tardo-antique, paru également en 1971[8]. Ce ne fut donc pas une surprise lorsque, vingt-cinq ans plus tard, il y a eu des festivités pour marquer le jubilé de la publication de ces deux textes, si différents l'un de l'autre du point de vue méthodologique, et qui, chacun à sa façon, lançaient une vision optimiste de l'Antiquité tardive.

Apogée d'un modèle

En 1997 Tomas Hägg revendiquait un nouveau profil pour la revue norvégienne de lettres classiques *Symbolae Osloenses*, fondée dans les années 1920. S'adressant à la communauté savante internationale, il sollicitait des contributions qui auraient embrassé, à partir d'horizons infiniment plus vastes que ceux de la perspective classicisante, les cultures grecque et latine dans toute leur diachronie. Cette diversité devait se refléter dans des débats interdisciplinaires par lesquels allait s'ouvrir désormais chaque volume. Ainsi, l'ère nouvelle dans la vie de la revue fut inaugurée par une discussion consacrée au livre de Peter Brown et intitulée « The world of late antiquity revisited »[9]. On ne devrait pas, cependant, se hâter à découvrir dans ce titre des accents proustiens ; le retour ne fut qu'un triomphe et qu'une occasion de joyeuse remémoration[10]. Un rapport de Peter Brown, offrant de généreuses (et parfois intimes) informations sur la genèse du livre, sur ses mentors et ses bêtes noires[11], circula parmi une pléiade d'élèves et de collègues, invités par la Revue à commenter, avec le concours de ce texte, l'impact du livre. Les contributeurs au volume commémoratif ont longuement analysé l'apport de l'approche non-conflictuelle introduite aux

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[8] « The rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity », *JRS* 61 (1971), p. 80–101 (repris dans *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Londres 1982, p. 103–52).

[9] *SO* 72, p. 5–90.

[10] À l'exception de Hjalmar Torp, qui troubla la fête par ses remarques critiques sur le traitement du matériau artistique par Peter Brown (*SO* 72, p. 59–65), les autres contributeurs ont mis l'accent sur le rôle crucial du livre dans la formation de la discipline. Selon la définition avancée par un des élèves les plus doués de Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* serait un « masterpiece of discreet insemination » (Fowden, *SO* 72, p. 48).

[11] Outre l'influence majeure exercée sur sa pensée par l'anthropologue Mary Douglas (*SO* 72, p. 21–2), Peter Brown s'attarde, dans sa réponse finale, sur l'importance qu'a eu pour sa formation l'École de l'historicisme : « [German *Historismus*] offered me a view of the late antique period as an organic whole, whose phases of development were not cut into little pieces by arbitrary chronological boundaries (of a largely political nature) and whose many-facetted civilization was not compartmentalized in a manner that reflected the institutionalized myopia of contemporary universities » (*ibid.*, p. 73).

études de l'Antiquité tardive par Peter Brown, en insistant surtout sur le caractère inapproprié des couples légués par les maîtres de la décadence : « christianisme et paganisme », « orthodoxie et hérésie », « haute spiritualité et religion des masses », « cité et campagne », « Rome et Iran », « Romains et Barbares », « élites et peuple ». Autant de barrières jetées à bas et piétinées. Déjà, dans son discours liminaire, Peter Brown s'était félicité d'avoir vidé un des mots-clés du vocabulaire tardo-antique – le terme *xenos* – de son contenu tragique d'« étranger » (et même d'« aliéné » !), pour le rattacher au concept d'une terre nouvelle, la καινὴ κτίσις, d'un au-delà – ou plutôt d'un ailleurs intérieur – rayonnant d'espoir[12]. Et, dans le renvoi substantiel qui clôt le débat (p. 70–80), il offre une succincte analyse de ses principales thèses, qu'il place fermement sous le signe du postmodernisme[13].

En amateur éclairé des disciplines de la psychologie et de l'anthropologie sociale, Peter Brown a mis leurs méthodes à son service pour avancer des interprétations originales et hardies, en même temps qu'il adoptait et adaptait à ses besoins les modèles d'une historiographie classique. C'est ainsi qu'il emprunta à Santo Mazzarino la notion de « démocratisation de la culture » tardo-antique[14] pour l'allier, en prestidigitateur génial, à celle de la contamination des courants spirituels de l'époque, proposée par Pierre Hadot[15] – entreprise qui devait lui permettre d'animer un univers lumineux et irénique sur lequel avaient cessé de peser les ombres lourdes de Rostovtzeff et, surtout, de E.R. Dodds.

L'ère d'angoisse devenait, grâce « au parfum de révisionnisme passionné » dispensé par Peter Brown[16], une ère d'ambition. La montée du saint brownien dans un monde restructuré à la suite du démantèlement des frontières de toute espèce, et surtout celles qui séparaient la religion des lettrés de la superstition des masses, proclamait, pour citer Philip Rousseau, « la révolution du comportement » représentée par « la sainteté » dont Peter Brown s'est fait le chroniqueur[17]. Son *étranger* – le *xenos*, qui gagne son statut « sur-humain » dans la société tardo-antique par son renoncement aux plaisirs et aux besoins d'une vie quotidienne, devient, par l'effet même de cette abdication outrée, le héros, le guide et le sauveur d'une société qui a su répondre

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[12] En guise de commentaire à sa reconceptualisation de ces termes, Brown écrit (*SO* 72, p. 20) : « What was at issue was a need to decode an alien language of the *psyche*, that spoke, in reality, not of escape, so much as of the unexpected welling-up, in disregarded persons and neglected regions, of a new, fierce sense of agency ».

[13] Voir surtout *SO* 72, p. 77–8 : « my own experience of scholarship conducted in the light of « post-modern » concerns has led me to be grateful for many of the shifts of emphasis that it has brought about ».

[14] Voir *infra*, section III.

[15] Surtout dans « La fin du paganisme », in H.-C. Puech (éd.), *Histoire des religions*, Paris 1972, II, p. 81–113.

[16] Phrase de G.W. Bowersock, *SO* 72, p. 31.

[17] *SO* 72, p. 55. L'importance de la *behavioral revolution* dans ce contexte est également soulignée par E.A. Clark (*ibid.*, p. 39).

avec succès aux défis de son temps en prenant son sort en mains. « An Age of Ambition » ! Armé de miséricorde et sujet, comme son Dieu, à de terribles accès de colère[18], mais surtout sachant exactement comment réagir en toute occasion, ce saint sorti du peuple est l'incarnation de la réussite absolue dans la société tardo-antique : par son rôle de médiateur entre le village et l'empereur et d'intercesseur auprès de Dieu pour l'humanité tout entière, l'humble ermite devient le lien entre les deux mondes. Pour citer Peter Brown encore une fois : « Vue en ces termes, la victoire du christianisme dans la société romaine tardive ne fut pas la victoire du Dieu unique sur la multiplicité des dieux ; ce fut la victoire des hommes sur les institutions de leur passé »[19]. Voilà le message triomphal – message, soulignons-le, qui fait écho au discours de l'hagiographe byzantin – dont on a célébré le vingt-cinquième anniversaire avec des solennités académiques qui ont, elles aussi, abouti à une publication : le cahier d'automne du tome 6 du *Journal of Early Christian Studies.*

Elevés dans le climat politique de détente qui succéda à la guerre froide, nourris avec les principes d'un individualisme doté de quelque chose d'anarchique et inspirés par le mouvement pacifiste des années soixante et soixante-dix, les élèves et continuateurs de Peter Brown ont naturellement perçu l'Antiquité tardive en leurs propres termes, minimisant tout conflit – le bannissant même de son terrain – et exaltant la révolution du comportement menée par ses *xenoi*[20], dont les prouesses ne sont pas sans rappeler celles des *overachievers* des années quatre-vingt dans le domaine de la finance[21].

L'abolition des frontières méthodologiques entre disciplines, déjà hissée en incontestable orthodoxie dans les deux volumes commémorant la réconceptualisation de la fin de l'Antiquité par Peter Brown, allait recevoir sa forme canonique dans un tome collectif à l'air encyclopédique intitulé *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*[22]. Paru en 1999 et signé par Peter Brown lui-même et deux autres savants princetoniens, Glen Bowersock et Oleg Grabar, ce livre de 780 pages est divisé en deux parties indépendantes, ce qui permet d'ailleurs à la première d'entre elles, composée d'études sur la société et la vie spirituelle tardo-antiques de circuler séparément[23]. Une Introduction, suivie de onze articles thématiques composés par plusieurs auteurs, et un Guide alphabétique (couvrant quelque 500 pages) proclament l'Antiquité tardive comme ère historique autonome s'étendant de 250 après J.Chr.

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[18] P. Brown, « The rise and function of the holy man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997 », in *Journal of Early Christian Studies,* 6 (1998), p. 367.

[19] P. Brown, *art. cit.* (n.8), p. 100.

[20] Pour cette analyse, voir F. Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Mediaeval World,* Stroud 2003, p. 15, avec références.

[21] Sur le terme, abusivement employé dans ce contexte par R. Lane Fox, cf. son *Pagans and Christians*, Londres 1986, p. 339 (deux fois), 449, 557, 558 (quatre fois !), 559, 568, 571, 603.

[22] Cambridge Mass. et Londres 1999.

[23] G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar (éds), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, Cambridge Mass. et Londres 2001.

à 800[24]. Au défi chronologique s'ajoutent des revendications spatiales, la juridiction de l'Antiquité tardive s'étendant jusqu'à la Chine, puisqu'on y rencontre des adeptes du christianisme et du manichéisme, deux religions formées dans l'espace tardo-antique[25]. Pourtant la Chine ne représente qu'un point idéal plutôt que réel sur la carte reconfigurée de l'Antiquité tardive : sa véritable frontière coincide avec l'Afganistan actuel, contrée dont la centralité n'est que trop évidente dans la thématisation du Guide. La prééminence des Sassanides et de l'islam est là pour nous rappeler que le véritable héritier de l'empire romain est Harun al Rashid plutôt que Charlemagne. Cette formule hardie, prononcée pour la première fois par Peter Brown en 1971, a dû être révisée (et adoucie) pour accommoder les exigences oecuméniques du Guide, où l'on lit que chacun des deux est, à sa propre façon, l'héritier d'une ère impériale remarquable[26].

A l'abolition des frontières géographiques correspond la suppression des barrières épistémologiques : l'archéologie de la vie quotidienne avec son accent sur la culture matérielle, l'écologie, la géographie sacrée et profane du paysage tardo-antique et son ethnographie se combinent avec des disciplines plus traditionnelles, telle la théologie et l'histoire militaire, pour livrer l'image d'une Antiquité tardive qui correspond à une vision politiquement correcte selon les normes d'aujourd'hui. On remarque le refus de la part des auteurs de se prononcer sur la valeur comparative de tout produit intellectuel ou artistique humain et même de toute situation sociale : les choses sont différentes ; jamais meilleures ou pires ! Quant au Guide alphabétique, il apparaît comme la quintessence de la modernité, tant par ses choix (nécessairement arbitraires) que par ses omissions (encore plus parlantes). On y rencontre des articles substantiels sur les femmes, le mariage et le divorce, l'érotisme et la nudité, mais, étrangement pour un Lexique de l'Antiquité tardive, on ne trouve rien sur les eunuques. Parmi les religions à mystères, le mithraïsme est jugé digne de traitement, tandis que le culte beaucoup plus universel – à la fois public et privé – voué à la Magna Mater est complètement ignoré – ni Attis ni Cybèle ne figurent parmi les lemmes. Un article plus long que ceux qui traitent de Plotin ou de Justinien est consacré à la philosophe-martyre Hypatia, tandis que l'organisateur du platonisme en communauté scripturaire, Jamblique, dont l'oeuvre et les activités sont en ce moment le sujet d'un considérable renouveau d'intérêt de la part tant des philosophes que des historiens, brille par son absence. Et un collègue, qui espérait découvrir dans le

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[24] Voir p. IX et *passim*.

[25] Voir p. X de l'Introduction et cf. l'inclusion de l'article 'China' au *Guide* ; voir la réponse de Bowersock à la critique de Giardina : « The flight from the canonical center has led to the discovery of many new local centers. […] Late antiquity is conspicuously not confined to the Mediterranean, nor is it suffering from hypertrophy » : « Centrifugal force in late antique historiography », in C. Straw & R. Lim (éd.), *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies in Late Antiquity*, Turnhout 2004 (BAT 6), p. 23.

[26] *Guide*, p. VIII. Cf. P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, p. 9 et *SO* 72, p. 17.

Guide un article sur le préfet du prétoire (« *praetorian prefect* »), s'est vite rendu compte qu'aucune entrée n'intervenait entre « pornography » et « prayer ». A l'exception de quelques charmantes excentricités – l'article sur les chameaux par exemple étant trois fois plus long que celui sur le califat qui le précède immédiatement –, le Guide reproduit tous les clichés du modèle post-moderne de l'Antiquité tardive. Signalons pourtant que, ce qui dans les années soixante-dix et quatre-vingt était inspiré par la spontanéité et la fraîcheur de la découverte, porte ici le carcan de l'orthodoxie.

Pour les éditeurs du volume, la créativité de l'Antiquité tardive s'exprime surtout dans son génie religieux. C'est ainsi qu'ils encouragent les zoroastriens et les juifs, les musulmans et les chrétiens d'aujourd'hui à visiter ce Guide pour découvrir leurs racines historiques. L'insistance portée, non seulement sur la continuité entre l'antiquité classique et celle de l'arrière-saison, mais aussi sur la permanence et la pertinence de l'héritage tardo-antique dans le présent est un thème obsessionnel. Notre monde n'est pas présenté comme un monde avec des affinités ou des traits communs avec l'Antiquité tardive, mais, grâce à tant de paravents enlevés, comme son prolongement naturel sur le plan tant idéologique que réel[27]. On se trouve en effet face à une étape plus avancée d'optimisme que celle qui se révèle dans la répudiation de toute notion de crise et de décadence du champ de l'histoire romaine[28]. On aurait pu pourtant souligner les remarquables analogies (plutôt que « continuités ») entre notre époque et l'Antiquité tardive dans un esprit pessimiste ou cynique, en mettant l'accent sur les intégrismes religieux, le culte de la violence, la *démocratisation de la culture* à vecteur descendant, et les armées croissantes de nouveaux pauvres parmi les représentants des classes moyennes dans l'Occident, en même temps que la montée météorique d'une nouvelle classe de technocrates, dont Libanius peint le portrait à vives couleurs.

L'antithèse

1999 fut une année butoir pour l'Antiquité tardive. Son heureux expansionnisme, la conquête inopposée d'horizons toujours plus vastes, fut dénoncé par un historien italien – Andrea Giardina – en des termes virulents[29]. Parue dans la revue savante *Studi Storici* sous le titre « Esplosione di tardoantico », cette formidable attaque fait l'anatomie du paradigme historiographique de la longue Antiquité tardive en recherchant les causes qui ont permis sa naissance et réception. Deux facteurs complémentaires sont, selon Giardina, à l'origine de ce phénomène : « la rhétorique de

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[27] C'est ainsi qu'on trouve à la p. IX de l'Introduction, la constatation suivante : « Not only did late antiquity last for over half a millennium ; much of what was created in that period still runs in our veins » .

[28] Seule exception, allant à l'encontre de l'esprit gai du volume, l'article de R. Lim, 'Christian triumph and controversy', p. 196–218, qui raconte une histoire de musellement progressif.

[29] « Esplosione di tardoantico », *Studi Storici* 40 (1999), 157–80.

la modernité » et l'impérialisme linguistique de l'anglais dans le monde contemporain, les promoteurs du modèle d'une Antiquité tardive expansive appartenant dans leur écrasante majorité au « club anglo-saxon »[30].

Ensuite Andrea Giardina nomme les précurseurs qui ont préparé, à leur insu, le terrain à la démarche de Peter Brown – sa « guérilla », d'après sa propre expression, contre les champs traditionnellement tenus par les historiens des institutions politiques et sociales, par les médiévistes et les orientalistes[31]. Parmi les devanciers, la première place est assignée à l'inventeur de la *Spätantike*, l'Autrichien Alois Riegl et son concept de *Kunstwollen* (1901)[32] ; suit Santo Mazzarino avec sa théorie de la démocratisation de la culture ; enfin vient André Piganiol et son refus d'associer toute notion de décadence avec la société du bas-empire. Pourtant, si ces hommes ont indiqué à Peter Brown de nouvelles pistes pour y exercer son ingéniosité, tout en lui fournissant des outils méthodologiques pour la construction d'une Antiquité tardive plus lumineuse, l'idée de la prolongation de cette ère historique au-delà de la chute de l'Empire de l'Occident et l'invitation à considérer la Méditerranée comme un monde uniforme appartiennent sans doute à l'historien belge Henri Pirenne, aux intuitions historiques de qui Peter Brown a consacré un article vraiment magistral[33].

Giardina met aussi le doigt sur les singularités d'une méthodologie qui permet à Peter Brown de contourner les obstacles érigés sur son chemin par le témoignage des sources pour accéder à sa vision d'une ère à la fois optimiste et moderne : « Les récits [de Peter Brown] sont peuplés de documents, mais le rapport qu'il entretient avec chaque document particulier crée une inversion de perspective spéciale, un effet pour ainsi dire de rapprochement-éloignement, qui le rend virtuellement intangible »[34]. Malgré une certaine exagération, dictée par les conventions du genre polémique, on y reconnaît la manière de Peter Brown. J'ajouterais que, souvent, ce qui se trouve

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[30] Voir notamment, *ibid.*, p. 158–63 et 167.

[31] « It was possible, at Oxford, to settle down, within a few years, to a dogged *guerilla* against the dominant, melodramatic notion of the decline and fall of the Roman empire. It was a *guerilla*, conducted on every level of detail, and in many environments » (*SO* 72, p. 9–10). Pour sa campagne contre l'autorité de Rostovtzeff, de Festugière et de Dodds, P. Brown écrit : « The time had come for yet another *guerilla*, conducted now, not on the social structure of the later Roman empire, but on a wide field – the role of religion in society in the entire late classical period » (*ibid.*, p. 20).

[32] Son livre fondateur *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie* fut publié en 1901. Comme le remarque un de ses collègues dans la nécrologie qu'il consacre à Alois Riegl en 1905, il s'agit de « ein Werk von ungewöhnlicher Geisteskraft ». Pour une traduction annotée de l'ouvrage en anglais, cf. R. Winkes, *Late Roman art industry*, Rome 1985. Voir aussi J.-P. Caillet, « Alois Riegl et le fait social dans l'art de l'Antiquité tardive », *Antiquité Tardive* 9 (2001), 47–51.

[33] « *Mohammed and Charlemagne* by Henri Pirenne », Daedalus 103 (1974), p. 25–33, repris dans *Society and the Holy* (*cit.* n. 8), p. 63–79.

[34] *Studi Storici* (cit. n. 29), p. 167 ; à comparer avec A. Murray (« Peter Brown and the shadow of Constantine », *JRS* 73 (1983), p. 195): « The vivid generalizations, each attended by its elegant retinue of examples, can beguile the reader on to soft ground without warning ».

à la racine d'une reconstruction fascinante d'une scène de vie sociale ou religieuse n'est qu'une lecture trop hative d'un passage rédigé dans une langue morte.

Réponse à la réaction

Lancé au moment propice – le juste *kairos* –, le cri de colère d'Andrea Giardina, avec son appel passionné aux historiens à ré-examiner leurs choix et à ré-orienter leurs recherches vers les institutions administratives et les structures socio-économiques du monde romain, a eu une répercussion retentissante. Comme une pierre jetée soudain au milieu d'un lac serein, ce défi a produit toute une série de cercles qui s'agrandissent à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent du centre. Le calme qui régnait jusqu'alors dans le milieu tardo-antique s'est rompu.

La réaction immédiate de la communauté internationale a coïncidé avec un effort pour rétablir la paix en son sein. Des rencontres et des colloques ont été organisés pour discuter, dans un esprit consensuel, sur l'autonomie menacée de l'Antiquité tardive et la légitimité d'une approche historique visant exclusivement le domaine socio-culturel[35]. De ces débats, subtils et polis aux conclusions équivoques, les représentants du club anglo-saxon étaient largement, et parfois totalement, absents. Exception faite pour Glen Bowersock, qui a essayé, dans le cadre d'une table ronde convoquée à Capri, de réconcilier par un discours d'une superbe élégance les thèses des deux camps[36], la seule personne à relever le gant jeté par Andrea Giardina fut le Professeur Averil Cameron. Dans un long article intitulé « The 'long' late antiquity: a late twentieth-century model », elle produit une bibliographie exhaustive et raisonnée du phénomène anglocentrique, décrit (et décrié) par l'historien italien[37]. En vérité, il s'agit d'une défense et illustration du modèle postmoderne (modèle inspiré, comme le souligne bien Wolf Liebeschuetz, par une combinaison d'agnosticisme historiographique avec l'éthique du New Labour) et qui, selon la savante anglaise, traduit fidèlement l'humeur optimiste qui régnait en Angleterre et aux Etats-Unis dans le dernier quart du XX^{e} siècle[38]. Pourtant, malgré l'érudite exhaustivité de l'article, je dois avouer que j'ai vainement essayé de découvrir, dans le ton complaisant et ostentatoirement libéral de ses pages, une réponse à l'accablante critique qui est à leur racine. En effet, si je ne me trompe pas trop, jusqu'à maintenant il n'y a pas eu

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[35] Sur l'importante discussion autour de la démocratisation de la culture, inspirée par le concept lancé par Santo Mazzarino et à laquelle est consacrée, à la suite d'un Colloque, la partie monographique du volume 9 (2001) de l'*Antiquité Tardive*, voir *infra*, section III.

[36] « Riflessioni sulla periodizzazione dopo 'Esplosione del tardoantico' di Andrea Giardina », *Studi Storici* 45 (2004), p. 7–13.

[37] In T.P. Wiseman (éd.), *Classics in progress*, Oxford 2002 (British Academy Centenary Series), p. 165–91.

[38] W. Liebeschuetz, « Late Antiquity, the rejection of 'Decline', and multiculturalism », in *Atti dell'Academia romanistica costantiniana: XIV Convegno internazionale in memoria di Guglielmo Nocera*, Naples 2003, p. 646–8.

d'offensive organisée contre l'attaque lancée par Andrea Giardina. Bien au contraire ! Un volume collectif, paru récemment sous le titre *The past before us: the challenge of historiographies of late antiquity*, avec la collaboration de quelques uns des noms les plus sonores de la vieille garde, ne fait qu'articuler toutes les thématiques et tous les clichés du modèle postmoderne de l'Antiquité tardive[39]. Le lecteur n'a même pas besoin d'ouvrir le volume pour se rendre compte de son orientation : sur la couverture, l'impressionnant portrait de *Mégalopsychia* (symbole de la magnanimité et, dans un sens tardif et restreint, de l'esprit de la libéralité) en dit long sur l'approche méthodologique adoptée par les contributeurs.

Revenant à la critique d'Andrea Giardina, on ne saurait pas dire si, par sa contestation de la vision optimiste d'une Antiquité tardive longue et paisible, multiculturelle et multidisciplinaire, le savant italien n'a pas précipité un développement dont on discernait déjà les débuts timides ; ou si sa protestation ne serait pas symptomatique d'une évolution qui mûrissait simultanément dans des quartiers divers. Ce qui est sûr, c'est que c'est dans ce contexte qu'on doit parler de deux livres, parus respectivement en 2001 et 2005 aux éditions de l'Oxford University Press. Portant le titre provocateur de *Decline and fall of the Roman city*, l'ouvrage de Wolf Liebeschuetz est consacré à l'analyse du passage de la cité-état gouvernée par ses conseillers municipaux à l'état universel régi par un monarque, mutation que l'auteur situe entre le V^e^ et le VIII^e^ siècles ; c'est l'histoire du déclin et de la disparition de tout un genre de vie avec ses institutions administratives et culturelles, légué à l'Empire par le génie hellénistique. L'insistance de Liebeschuetz sur les notions de décadence et de perte, insistance fondée sur la lecture critique d'une vaste gamme de documents, nous force, sinon à retourner au « paradigme évanescent de la chute de Rome »[40], du moins à questionner les certitudes récentes qui prêchent la continuité entre la cité romaine et ses successeurs tant en pays d'islam que dans l'Europe occidentale.

C'est justement autour de ce dernier thème que tournent les recherches de Bryan Ward-Perkins, à qui nous devons, sous le titre apocalyptique *The fall of Rome and the end of civilization*, un ouvrage qui souligne la violence des invasions barbares et s'attarde sur le trauma de la dissolution de l'empire. Par ce livre, Ward-Perkins répond aux avocats de la thèse selon laquelle, à partir du V^e^ siècle, les tribus germaniques deviennent les bénéficiaires d'une politique de compromis de la part de Rome[41]. Renversant l'ordre gibbonien, l'auteur propose un modèle selon lequel le déclin est le résultat de la chute. Fondée sur une analyse des données de l'archéologie, cette thèse

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[39] C. Straw et R. Lim (éd), *cit.* n. 25.

[40] Voir G.W. Bowersock, « The vanishing paradigm of the fall of Rome », 1996, in *id. Selected Papers on Late Antiquity*, Bari 2000, 187–97.

[41] Le principal porte-parole de la thèse de « l'accommodationisme » est W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418–584: The Techniques of Accommodation*, Princeton 1980 ; *id.*, *Rome's Fall and After*, Londres et Ronceverte 1989 : discussion de la thèse chez B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, Oxford 2005, p. 7–10.

contredit sur tous les points l'orthodoxie de la transformation du monde romain et de l'ethnogenèse des nations de l'Europe du Nord, gigantesque projet multinational, financé, depuis quelques années, par l'Union des Académies Européennes. Déjà, dans un travail collectif, ironiquement paru sous les auspices de ce schéma, Bryan Ward-Perkins avait dénoncé un mythe des origines qui placerait le noyau de l'Europe « au nord des Alpes, à l'est des Pyrénées et à l'ouest de l'Elbe », privilégiant ainsi une perspective historique créée pour accommoder une Union Européenne dont le centre coïnciderait avec Strasbourg, Bruxelles et Frankfort ![42]

De façon sinon aussi explicite, du moins plus systématique et approfondie, Wolf Liebeschuetz a lié les méthodes des champions de la continuité aux idéologies de notre temps. Dans un article théorique, paru, avec de légères modifications, dans des journaux savants en Italie et en Angleterre, il montre à partir de quelles prémisses idéologiques les savants anglo-saxons sont parvenus à déprécier le fait de la désintégration des structures politiques et administratives dans le passé et à ignorer l'écroulement de toute une culture, sur les mérites de laquelle l'historien n'a plus le droit de se prononcer[43]. En effet, nous avons là un texte-miroir de l'exposé d'Averil Cameron. Indigné contre le relativisme des milieux historiques des universités anglo-saxonnes où l'on prêche l'évangile de la continuité, Liebeschuetz conclut que « le déclin de l'un est le progrès de l'autre », boutade d'autant plus amusante, qu'elle est calquée sur le proverbe anglais bien connu « one man's meat is another man's poison ».[44]

III La démocratisation de la culture

Une des tentatives les plus résolues vers la réconciliation des différentes attitudes face à l'Antiquité tardive a eu lieu en juin 2000 à Vecelli. Le but du Colloque, dont les travaux ré-élaborés ont paru dans le tome 9 d'*Antiquité Tardive*, était de

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[42] G.P. Brogiolo et B. Ward-Perkins (éds), *The Idea and the Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden 1999, p. XVI.

[43] « Late antiquity, the rejection of 'Decline' and multiculturalism », *cit.* n. 38, p. 639–52 (cf. *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 45 (2001), pour une version préliminaire). Très instructif à cet égard est le débat qui conclut le volume édité par L. Lavan, « Recent research in late-antique urbanism » *JRA*, Suppl. Ser. 42 (2001), p. 238–45, où les représentants du postmodernisme s'engagent à répondre à la question posée par W. Liebeschuetz, « Was Gibbon politically incorrect ? » (*ibid.*, p. 233–8).

[44] [Note ajoutée à l'original] : La discussion est loin de prendre fin. En 2008, l'Université américaine de Johns Hopkins a lancé une nouvelle revue internationale, intitulée *Journal of Late Antiquity*. Deux articles, aux titres parlants, inaugurent son premier numéro, faisant l'histoire du concept de l'Antiquité tardive et questionnant les présupposés sur lesquels il se fonde. Au ton ironique de Edward James (« The rise and function of the concept of 'late antiquity' », p. 20–30, titre calqué sur l'intitulé du fameux article de Peter Brown sur le « holy man », voir *supra*, n. 8.) fait pendant le discours discret de Arnaldo Marcone (« A long late antiquity? Considerations on a controversial periodization », p. 4–19), qui opte pour une équivoque qui n'offense personne.

mettre en épreuve dans les divers domaines de l'histoire politique, sociale et culturelle, le paradigme de la démocratisation de la culture lancé dans les années 1950 par Santo Mazzarino et canonisé en 1960 lors du XI[e] Congrès international des Sciences historiques tenu à Stockholm[45]. Ayant d'abord tenté de saisir et de définir ce concept par rapport aux courants historiographiques auxquels il devait sa genèse, les intervenants ont considéré, séparément et lors des discussions concluant les différents cycles thématiques du Colloque, l'utilité d'un tel model interprétatif, tant pour l'étude des langues et des productions artistiques et littéraires du monde tardoantique que pour l'appréciation de l'identité socio-culturelle de ses participants, traditionnels ou nouveaux venus. De même, grâce à la double direction (ascendante et descendante) de son mouvement dans la société, cette force unificatrice qu'est en dernière analyse « la démocratisation de la culture » a pu servir, comme le signale à ce propos Jean-Michel Carrié[46], de grille exégétique aux approches rivales du déclin et du renouveau du monde tardoantique : les « catastrophistes » y ont vu une force destructive, alors que les apôtres d'une vision optimiste y reconnaissent un instrument de progrès.

Pourtant, l'aire de pertinence du paradigme est à la fois plus vaste et plus restreinte que les usages qu'on lui a appliqués pendant le demi-siècle de son essor. C'est surtout sur ce point qu'a mis l'accent, dans son discours de clôture, Andrea Giardina, en rappelant que la notion de la démocratisation de la culture utilisée dans le cadre du Congrès était souvent sans rapport avec celle lancée par Santo Mazzarino lui-même. Aux mains habiles de son inventeur, la démocratisation de la culture ne fut qu'un outil méthodologique flexible, se prêtant à l'analyse des situations aussi diverses que la crise du III[e] siècle et les tentatives des empereurs chrétiens vers la construction d'une formidable hiérarchie au IV[e] siècle. En revanche, pour les champions de la modernité, ce n'est qu'un palan à l'aide duquel ils ont pu élevé, sur les fondements de l'Antiquité propre, l'immense édifice d'une Antiquité tardive, longue et sans fissure.

Tout en signalant les risques représentés par l'ambiguïté du terme « démocratisation de la culture », les interlocuteurs ont laissé le débat ouvert, se gardant bien de prononcer des paradigmes alternatifs. Cet agnosticisme méthodologique est certes un indice de l'impasse où nous ont conduits les tentatives exégétiques de nos devanciers ; mais c'est en même temps un témoignage du désir pour une plus grande impartialité face à l'horizon changeant de l'Antiquité tardive. Peut-être le moment est-il finalement venu où, au lieu d'aborder le passé historique armés de nos questionnaires tout faits, nous nous y tiendrons libérés de nos corsets idéologiques et, tous pores ouverts, nous accueillerons les images et les paroles émises par ce passé pour les transmettre aussi fidèlement que possible par le moyen d'une écriture automatique. Mais avant de

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[45] S. Mazzarino, « La democratizzazione della cultura nel 'Basso impero' », *XI[e] Congrès international des sciences historiques (Stockholm, 21–28 août 1960), Rapports 2 : Antiquité*, Göteborg 1960, 35–54.

[46] « Antiquité tardive et « démocratisation de la culture » : un paradigme à géométrie variable », *Antiquité Tardive* 9 (2001), p. 27–46.

nous répandre en déclarations programmatiques, essayons de comprendre comment est née, dans le champs de l'Antiquité tardive, cette polysémie interprétative qui déroute le chercheur.

IV Miroirs identitaires

Depuis Giambattista Vico, on sait le caractère relatif, et même autobiographique, de toute tentative dans le domaine de l'historiographie. Personne ne peut s'évader de son présent – personne ne peut devenir un ermite dans le temps. Vérité de La Palice, mais qui mérite d'être répétée : nous sommes tous conditionnés par notre époque, et, ce qui est encore plus poignant, nous sommes les prisonniers de notre propre micro-milieu historique, social et idéologique. Au lieu de nous vider de nos préjugés personnels pour nous laisser envahir par l'Autre, au lieu d'abdiquer nos catégories mentales pour nous laisser pénétrer par celles d'une autre société, nous transportons dans le passé le bagage de nos propres soucis. Les meilleurs parmi nous n'arrivent pas à échapper à cette rétroprojection. Qui ne connaît les célèbres aphorismes qui concluent *l'Histoire sociale et économique de l'Empire romain* de Rostovtzeff, qui contemple la chute de l'empire romain à travers le prisme de sa propre expérience de la Révolution de 1917[47] ? Plus près de nous, André Piganiol a enfermé dans le fameux adage « la civilisation romaine n'est pas morte de sa belle mort. Elle a été assassinée »[48] toute l'amertume et le ressentiment que lui avait légués l'expérience de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale : les hordes germaniques auraient assassiné un organisme en pleine vigueur ! Les historiens d'Averil Cameron ont transposé à l'Antiquité tardive les soucis, les priorités et les habitudes mentales de notre propre société : habitat, féminisme, sexualité, minorités et démographie, intégrismes religieux et nationaux et construction d'identités de toute sorte dans un climat social à la fois permissif et fluide.

Et moi ? Echapperais-je au sort du subjectivisme historique ? Bien sûr que non ! Ayant été élevée dans le système éducatif grec, un système d'un hellénocentrisme outrancier, je salue avec enthousiasme toute violation des orthodoxies nationales et religieuses, sous le signe desquelles je fus introduite à cet autre univers – le royaume des morts – le passé. Pour l'écolier grec, l'Histoire commence avec l'Antiquité grecque qui, pour des raisons pratiques, se termine avec les conquêtes d'Alexandre, puisque

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[47] Rostovtzeff, *The social and economic history of the Roman empire*, Oxford 1957 (2e éd., revue par P. Fraser), p. 541 « Is it possible to extend a higher civilization to the lower classes without debasing its standard and diluting its quality to vanishing point ? Is not every civilization bound to decay as soon as it begins to penetrate the masses ? », propos qui ne sont pas sans renvoyer à la fameuse boutade qui conclut le livre de Gibbon, pour qui tout son effort se résumait à la minutieuse analyse du « triomphe de la barbarie et de la religion » : « in the preceding volumes of this History, I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion. » (*Decline and fall*, éd. J.B. Bury, Londres 1909, vol. VII, p. 308.)

[48] Piganiol, *L'empire chrétien (325–395)*, Paris 1947, p. 422.

l'univers hellénistique est trop bariolé pour les besoins d'un enseignement scolaire et même universitaire. D'Alexandre le Grand on saute à Constantin le Grand, qui, avec sa conversion au christianisme, inaugure la période byzantine dont la gloire s'étend jusqu'à 1453, lorsque le Turc vint fouler aux pieds une brillante civilisation. La troisième période de l'histoire nationale grecque commence en 1821 lorsque, tel un phénix, l'hellénisme renaît de ses cendres.

La grossièreté – le trauma même – de cette périodisation qui, avec d'infimes variations, domine à ce jour même nos programmes scolaires et, partant, notre horizon conceptuel, m'a inspiré de bonne heure une profonde incrédulité envers toute tentative de classification du temps historique. Et des années passées à Oxford j'ai gardé une certaine loyauté envers quelques aspects du modèle anglo-saxon de l'Antiquité tardive. Adepte de la longue durée braudelienne, je m'efforce de suivre dans les sociétés d'antan les imperceptibles transformations dont l'effet cumulatif aboutit à la création d'un nouveau visage collectif – d'une société nouvelle. Couloir obscur dans lequel s'affrontent les forces de la conservation avec celles du progrès, vase clos dans lequel se prépare une réaction chimique, l'Antiquité tardive est un intervalle entre deux étants, un *metaxy* au sens aristotélicien du terme, le lieu où s'effectue le passage d'une société organisée à la mesure de l'homme à une autre bâtie pour la plus grande gloire de Dieu[49].

V L'imaginaire de l'invisible

Καὶ πάντα εἴσω

Plotin III 8 [30]. 6.40

Ce glissement d'un univers anthropocentrique à un monde théocentrique est illustré de manière on ne peut plus frappante par la métamorphose du paysage urbain : à la multiplicité de petites et grandes cités, où l'aménagement de l'espace vital trahit le culte du corps et de l'esprit humains, succède la cité unique, que ce soit Constantinople ou Damas, avec ses magnifiques monuments, symboles de la majesté d'un Dieu unique et de son représentant terrestre, le basileus ou calife. Bibliothèques et odéons, parlements et portiques, où l'on se promène nonchalamment en discutant, théâtres et stades, bains et autres édifices consacrés à la joie de vivre sont désormais décriés comme tant de lieux maléfiques et – même avant de tomber en ruines – comme

[49] Cf. Paul, *Phil.* 3.19–20, qui oppose les communautés chrétiennes (« notre communauté est au ciel » – ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς) à tous ceux qui sont cloués à la terre (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες). De même, Plotin donnera un sens nouveau au vers homérique « partons pour notre chère patrie », lorsqu'il exhortera ses disciples de se tourner vers leur patrie céleste *Enn.* I 6.8.16: φεύγωμεν δὴ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα.

l'habitat des démons[50]. Indéniable métamorphose que l'historien doit contempler *sine ira et studio*, ce qui n'a toujours pas été le cas.

Les historiens qui, depuis Gibbon, ont déploré la décadence de la cité antique appartiennent, par droit de naissance ou d'adoption, aux classes bourgeoises de l'Occident et leur lamentations sur la disparition d'un mode de vie à la fois citadin et bourgeois ne font que refléter leur propre vision du monde. Si, pourtant, leur consternation devant le spectacle de l'écroulement progressif des bastions sur lesquels se fondait une existence largement séculière dans une autre société témoigne de leur empathie envers cette société et ses valeurs, elle trahit aussi leur crainte inavouée que l'histoire puisse se répéter. Tout pleins de leur propre vie, ils oublient en visitant l'Empire romain de se débarrasser de leur bagage idéologique et sentimental. De là les jugements de valeur qui concluent leurs analyses et qui, à nos yeux, constituent leur péché capital en matière de professionnalisme. Mais la présentation et l'interprétation des matériaux à leur disposition, leurs méticuleuses analyses et leurs synthèses finales ne font qu'évoquer de manière plus ou moins fidèle ce qui s'est passé.

La transformation radicale de la cité gréco-romaine, à partir du IV^e^ siècle au plus tard, le rétrécissement de son espace physique et mental qui aboutit inéluctablement à sa disparition, sont des faits incontestables. Si les substantifs « déclin » et « chute » sont chargés de trop de connotations émotives, évoquant dans notre esprit une vision passéiste de l'histoire, la réalité qui leur correspond, telle qu'elle se dégage d'une étude approfondie comme celle entreprise dernièrement par Wolf Liebeschuetz, est loin de les démentir. Pourtant, *nomina sunt omina*. Si cela est valable pour la terminologie du désastre, il en est de même, et à plus forte raison, pour la terminologie irénique, dictée par les conventions post-modernes. Les euphémismes qu'imposent au chercheur les règles d'un langage politiquement correct ne sont pas sans occasionner de graves dangers pour sa propre intégrité scientifique. Car, en évitant de nommer la chose par son vrai nom, on se voit tendre peu à peu à mettre en avant une argumentation destinée à soutenir une vision « soft » de la réalité ; et graduellement, on se trouve impliqué dans une campagne de justification d'une vue d'ensemble préfabriquée, d'un panorama construit *a priori*, comme une maquette d'architecte.

C'est ainsi qu'on s'évertue dernièrement à prouver la ténacité du modèle urbain gréco-romain dans le monde de la Méditerranée orientale, en produisant des exemples de survie, pris ici et là dans ses villes. Mais la simple découverte de quelques miettes matérielles appartenant aux sources dites froides, telles l'épigraphie, la numismatique ou l'archéologie, ne suffit pas pour tourner une ville byzantine ou ummayade en témoin de la mentalité anthropocentrique. C'est l'ambiance générale de la ville qui compte et, au VIII^e^ siècle au plus tard, le paysage urbain de la Plus Grande Méditerranée s'est irrévocablement métamorphosé.

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[50] Thématique analysée par G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire : études sur le recueil des « Patria »*, Paris 1984, p. 132–6 et *passim*.

Au minaret – ce symbole puissant de l'ordre nouveau qui s'élance de tous les points de la cité vers le ciel en évoquant les nouvelles préoccupations de ses habitants – fait pendant, dans la topographie de l'espace intérieur, le minbar, la chaire élevée d'où l'on prêche la parole de Dieu. Et comme dans les mosquées, de même dans les églises, on trouve de plus en plus ces tribunes élevées d'où le prédicateur adresse ses instructions à la masse uniforme des fidèles là-bas. Dans cette mer humaine, l'individu est noyé. La question que doit se poser l'historien face à cette réalité est la suivante : *comment* en arrive-t-on là, à la voix unique adressée à une silencieuse humanité – une humanité volontairement (ou, peut-être, seulement en apparence) écrasée ? Cette capitulation de la volonté individuelle, qui va souvent jusqu'à l'effacement total du moi et de ses revendications mondaines, ce changement d'humeur et de ton dans la collectivité ne pourrait pas être plus fidèlement rendu que par le terme qui couronne toute cette ère : *islam*, à savoir « soumission ». Mais *islam* n'est que le produit final d'une fermentation, le mot juste pour décrire l'aboutissement plutôt que le processus de transformation d'une anthropocratie en théocratie. Ce processus extrêmement complexe, cet entre-temps, déréglé et confus, entre deux manières diamétralement opposées de sentir, penser et voir le monde est notre Antiquité tardive qui possède la formule de la métamorphose. Notre travail à nous consiste à repérer quelques-uns au moins des tournants critiques au cours de cette fermentation.

Une approche à la fois plus honnête et plus intelligente que celle qui insiste sur la continuité des modes de pensée et de vie est pratiquée par quelques-uns : au lieu de nier tout changement radical à la sociologie et à l'âme tardoantique, ces historiens ont cessé d'être obsédés par le sort des cités. Si elles déclinent et disparaissent de la carte, c'est qu'elles sont remplacées par des entités beaucoup plus vastes comme scènes de la vie humaine : la montagne, la campagne, le désert ![51] La caméra doit donc se déplacer pour capturer d'autres gros plans. Ce qui manque pourtant à cette approche est le *comment*, l'analyse de la transition d'une réalité à une autre. Ce que Ferdinand Lot avait naguère défini comme « une rupture de continuité psychologique »[52] est un processus infiniment varié, désespéramment lent et, qui plus est, un processus qui ne s'est jamais achevé pour toutes les parties de la population. La polyphonie de la dissidence est absente d'un discours qui se veut totalisant. Ce qu'on pourrait imputer donc à cette méthodologie, en dehors de son regard biaisé, est son manque de nuance ; car elle ignore la vertigineuse diversité de l'altérité psychologique, intellectuelle et comportementale, si caractéristique d'une société en mutation, et se désintéresse de la gamme des motifs et des manifestations de la dissidence. En empruntant leur analyse au discours populiste de l'hagiographe byzantin, les défenseurs d'une telle approche s'identifient trop aisément au pèlerin idéal (plutôt que moyen) de l'Antiquité tardive. Une autre faiblesse de cette méthode est son refus (ou négligence) d'accorder à la

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[51] Postulat formulé par Peter Brown, *SO* 72, p. 70–71.

[52] *La fin du monde antique et le début du Moyen Âge*, Paris 1927, p. 2.

dimension théologique la place qui lui convient. Comme si, à l'historien bourgeois d'avant la Guerre, avec son attachement aux structures institutionnelles de la société, avait succédé le chroniqueur des *apparences* de l'événement religieux. Car ce qui est dramatiquement absent de l'analyse postmoderne est, en tout premier lieu, le fonds spirituel du phénomène religieux[53] ; et, à un autre niveau plus pragmatique, l'action sur la société de la ruse théologique : la manipulation de la théologie dans le but de contrôler tant la conscience individuelle que la politique internationale.

VI Le Sacré et le Profane

Là où l'on ne peut qu'être d'accord avec les « browniens », c'est sur l'hégémonie du culturel et le choix du domaine de l'impalpable comme terrain d'étude privilégié de l'Antiquité tardive. La religion, dans sa définition la plus vaste, est la force qui fertilise le politique, le social et l'intellectuel, la clé magique qui nous ouvre ce monde. Cela est incontestable. Que se soit comme système chronologique universel ou comme paradigme historiographique s'appliquant à toutes les époques, toutes les sociétés et tout le monde, le religieux inspire tout et explique tout[54]. C'est dans ce cadre que la communauté des croyants vient succéder à la cité comme point de référence identitaire de l'individu. Pour illustrer un pareil axiome, on ne peut mieux faire que d'introduire le couple ἱερός - βέβηλος (sacré – profane) qui à lui seul vient définir de plus en plus l'espace tardoantique. Mais avant de remonter à la source de cette antinomie, recherchons le profane dans son milieu d'origine.

Dans la Grèce ancienne, le terme βέβηλος dénote un espace non consacré, des lieux où il est possible de mettre le pied. Terme créé, selon Chantraine, sur le passé du verbe βαίνω (βέβηκα), le βέβηλος/ βέβηλον finit par signifier ce qui est permis et accessible à tout le monde, en même temps qu'il désigne le non-initié. Aucune nuance péjorative ne s'attache au terme sinon, à l'oreille d'une élite spirituelle, dans le contexte d'un rituel mystérique. En effet, dans la cité antique, c'est le βέβηλος plutôt que le possesseur d'une gnose ésotérique qui représente la normalité. Son *outsider* est l'ἰδιώτης, « l'homme privé », celui que ne se mêle pas des affaires de la *polis*, l'homme que le sort de la communauté dans laquelle il vit laisse indifférent. Aux antipodes de la fameuse définition aristotélicienne de l'homme comme ζῷον πολιτικόν, l'ἰδιώτης est inhumain. Cet usage négatif se perpétue parmi les représentants d'une élite

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[53] Pour s'arrêter sur un exemple frappant, la magistrale biographie que Peter Brown a consacré à Saint Augustin (*Augustine of Hippo: a biography*, Londres 1967) ignore le côté théologique de son apport. On pourrait dire en général de la vision postmoderne de l'Antiquité tardive que ce qu'elle a gagné en étendue, elle l'a perdu en profondeur. Une autre victime de cette approche – comme de toute méthodologie engagée – est le bon sens.

[54] Aux tentatives coordonnées d'Eusèbe de Césarée dans tous les domaines épistémologiques fait suite celle de Cosmas Indicopleustès qui, à la veille du Concile œcuménique de 553, propose dans sa *Topographie* une même grille de lecture pour l'univers physique et métaphysique.

platonicienne jusqu'à la fin de l'Antiquité[55]. En revanche, dans le christianisme, le terme ἰδιώτης est dès le début doté d'une connotation positive : déjà les apôtres sont désignés comme ἰδιῶται, c'est-à-dire comme des gens simples et modestes, sans présomption ni arrogance et sans idées reçues. Libres des entraves d'une éducation quelconque, ils sont mûrs pour recevoir le message divin[56].

Et le βέβηλος ? Quelle est sa fortune pendant l'époque post-classique ? A quelles vicissitudes sémantiques se plie-t-il lorsque l'Eglise chrétienne vient se substituer à la *polis* comme contexte à la fois social et métaphysique, prêtant du sens à une vie humaine ? Commençons par la sémiologie de la cité antique dont les murailles opposent l'espace des vivants à celui des morts regardés comme principale source de pollution[57]. A cette topographie explicite va succéder la topologie ambiguë et complexe de la ville chrétienne, marquée par leur cohabitation. A mesure que les aménités et les jouissances de la vie se transposent de la terre au ciel, les vivants cèdent leur habitat aux défunts, qui – martyrs en tête – franchissent les portes de la ville et viennent occuper un espace qui leur était jusqu'alors rituellement défendu. La révolution chrétienne face à l'événement de la mort a entraîné un renversement des règles de l'urbanisme. Le nouveau langage qu'inspire la rhétorique de la résurrection a transformé la mort en sommeil et les nécropoles en dortoirs[58]. La grande césure n'est plus entre vivants et morts, mais entre fidèles et infidèles dans le présent, le passé et l'éternité. Progressivement tout ce qui se trouve en dehors des confins bien définis de l'Eglise – que ce soit homme, objet, croyance ou tradition – devient βέβηλον, c'est-à-dire « profane ». Subissant une inversion de son sens, le terme βέβηλος ne désigne plus celui que mène une vie normale loin des conventicules mystiques, mais l'exclu, le paria, le pollué.

Antithèse tranchante, au propre et au figuré, le couple « sacré-profane » s'applique, dans l'Antiquité tardive, au présent, à l'avenir et, bien sûr, au passé. Flottant dans le temps et l'espace d'un océan séculier, les premiers chrétiens ont besoin de se définir et pour cela ils se servent de la norme de leurs écritures saintes – du canon qui se constitue à partir de la fin du II[e] siècle. L'océan des traditions qu'ils abordent *vient du dehors* et il dépend d'eux de lui ouvrir la porte pour accueillir ce qu'ils jugent utile à

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[55] Cf. Damascius, *Hist. Phil.* Fr. 146a Athanassiadi: l'ἰδιώτης est le vulgaire et, par extension, le bon à rien.

[56] Cf. Origène, *C.Cels.* VIII 47 : τοὺς Ἰησοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἄνδρας ἀγραμμάτους καὶ ἰδιώτας. C'est en dehors de la sémantique ecclésiale, et en perpétuant l'usage classique, que l'*idiot* gagnera, dans les langues modernes, son sens négatif. Par contre, en héritière directe de Byzance, la Grèce moderne n'attache aucune nuance péjorative au mot et à ses dérivés, que l'on entend dans le sens d'individu privé. Ce n'est que comme terme technique du vocabulaire médical, provenant d'un emprunt secondaire du français, que le mot désigne un individu mentalement handicapé.

[57] Cf. la formule succincte de R. Parker « the monstrous impurity of the corpse » : *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion*, Oxford 1983, p. 32.

[58] C'est le sens littéral du terme κοιμητήριον, transcrit en latin en *coemeterium*, d'où le français « cimetière ».

leur cause. C'est ainsi que toute sagesse qui n'est pas le produit, direct ou dérivé, de la révélation chrétienne est qualifiée de ἔξωθεν et de θύραθεν, termes auxquels nous n'accordons jamais leur sens littéral, mais que nous concevons dans le sens fort de « profane ». Le travail des Apologètes et des Pères de l'Eglise chrétienne à l'égard de cette littérature *venue du dehors* est connu. Labeur immense en vue de la classification de tout le savoir juif et grec *sub specie christianitatis*, puisque tout ce qui s'était passé avant l'Incarnation n'était qu'une *praeparatio evangelica.*

Cette dichotomie de l'héritage culturel de l'humanité à l'aune d'une règle de vérité n'est pas le propre exclusif des chrétiens. C'est une tendance universelle qui, par l'effet de l'osmose, va croissant dans la société de l'Empire. Comme je tente de le prouver ailleurs[59], à partir du milieu du III^e^ siècle au plus tard, les platoniciens s'occupent de plus en plus de sonder leur propre océan cognitif à l'aide de ce nouvel instrument d'évaluation – le canon –, soumettant eux aussi leurs biens culturels à l'épreuve du sacré. L'hellénisme de Jamblique et de Julien est une machine qui redéfinit son héritage culturel en l'étendant sur le lit de fer de Procruste : tout ce qui n'est pas interprétable selon les normes de la théologie jamblichéenne est tout simplement rejeté. C'est ainsi que la philosophie épicurienne dans son ensemble, le courant sceptique et le cynisme engagé du temps de Julien sont mis à l'index et déclarés hors-la-loi. Ce qui est plus intéressant encore c'est que, en constituant son orthodoxie, le platonisme procède à l'identification de ses bêtes noires, tant dans le présent que dans son passé réinventé, pour les flétrir du stigmate de l'hérétique.

Si, dans leur tentative de restructuration du monde, les maîtres spirituels des chrétiens et des païens pensent et agissent de manière analogue, on doit se demander quelle est l'attitude de la vaste majorité de leurs contemporains à cet égard ; à quel point, et surtout à quel niveau, la propagande des élites réussit à faire des convertis. Entre l'approche, *a priori* philosophique, de l'historiographie traditionnelle, qui fait le bilan de la contrainte et de la destruction, et l'optique psychologique post-moderne, qui se dresse en porte-parole des forces du progrès, peut se loger une troisième approche, qui tournerait le dos aux modèles théoriques et surtout aux grilles de lecture qui relèguent dans le domaine de la « rhétorique » tout ce que l'on refuse d'écouter et de comprendre dans son sens obvie, et chercherait à pénétrer, en observateur désintéressé, l'espace moyen entre innovation et réaction. On rencontrerait alors quelques-unes de ces figures incessamment sujettes au jeu de la corde tirée entre l'ancien et le nouveau, avec leurs tensions et leurs colères, leurs doutes et leurs indécisions.

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[59] Voir P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif*, Paris 2006, *passim.*

VII La violence ambiguë

Pendant qu'un édifice s'écroule et qu'un autre s'élève à sa place à l'aide des matériaux nouveaux et des reliquats réutilisés, on entend se mêler aux voix joyeuses des démolisseurs et des bâtisseurs (deux catégories qui ne s'identifient pas forcément entre elles) les gémissements de ceux qu'on écrase et de ceux qu'on dépossède, ainsi que les cris variables des observateurs, allant de la sympathie pour les victimes à l'approbation et la raillerie concernant leur sort. Spectateurs indifférents, ironiques ou indignés, agents et comparses de l'établissement de l'ordre nouveau, ils doivent tous être représentés dans le mémoire que dressera le chroniqueur. Et, par delà la polyphonie même des témoignages individuels, l'historien doit (comme on le fait lorsqu'on esquisse la biographie intellectuelle d'un personnage de marque) s'efforcer de détecter les dynamiques en compétition dans un même cerveau pour une foule de gens aussi vaste et aussi variée que possible.

Pour traduire l'Antiquité tardive, Peter Brown s'est servi d'un mélange explosif fait de religion, de sexe et de violence. De ce trio exégétique je serais portée à garder le premier et le dernier élément et postulerais que le concept de la religion doive être approfondi et raffiné par delà ses facettes sociologique et psychologique. Envisagée surtout dans sa dimension intellectuelle et spirituelle, la religion dans l'Antiquité tardive doit être également considérée comme force politique brute, disposant de formidables machines de contrôle social – le codex, le canon, le sermon, le florilège, pour n'en nommer que quelques-unes. Tous ces produits de la technologie tardoantique méritent une analyse minutieuse dans le contexte des hiérarchies qui les promeuvent. Quant à la violence inhérente à la société, elle ne constitue qu'un aspect ou une démarche de la pratique religieuse. Force ambiguë et ambivalente, tour à tour dénigrée et célébrée par ses utilisateurs même, la violence aux mille visages est endémique dans l'Empire romain. Ce qui nous intéresse dans ce contexte est la manière dont cette force agit sur le christianisme et comment elle est reçue, canalisée et exploitée par lui. Si, dès le premier jour, l'Eglise se nourrit des querelles de ses membres et du sang de ses martyrs, ce qui intéresse le chercheur est le pourquoi et le comment de ce processus.

Un des aspects les plus manifestes et les plus complexes de la violence omniprésente dans la société romaine est le martyre – ce spectaculaire pont de sang jeté par l'espoir et le désespoir des multitudes croissantes entre ce monde et l'au-delà. Infaillible indice du passage d'une réalité sociale à une autre, la boule de neige du martyre volontaire (que grossissent la rhétorique du prédicateur et la prose sadique du chroniqueur) élabore des mentalités qui survivront à sa nécessité pratique, et pétrit de sauvages servitudes à travers un large spectre de la société tardoantique[60].

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[60] Un des instantanés les plus célèbres est rapporté par Augustin à propos de son ami Alypius. Une fois dans l'amphithéâtre, le sage Alypius n'arrive pas à résister à la volupté que procure le spectacle du sang : *et cruenta voluptate inebriabatur* ! Malgré sa ferme décision d'y assister les yeux fermés, au moment

Principalement inspiré par le désir de la couronne rouge – et donc lié aux dogmes chrétiens de la résurrection du corps et du dernier jugement –, le martyre s'intègre pourtant dans le cadre de la culture de l'amphithéâtre[61]. Et, en même temps qu'une *imitatio Christi*, c'est une manière de dire son rejet des mœurs de la société impériale[62]. Il y en a d'autres, qui ne s'inscrivent pas moins dans le cercle de la violence. Ce sont des méthodes moins austères que le suicide ostentatoire, mais également efficaces, dont l'objectif est de répandre son propre point de vue moral et métaphysique dans la société. La pratique du prosélytisme, que je qualifierais comme une forme de violence douce, en est une.

La violence douce

Le succès éclatant des diverses méthodes d'endoctrinement montre en effet que la société de l'Empire était mûre pour accepter l'enseignement des hommes et des femmes dont l'ultime but était la conversion d'autrui. Depuis A.D. Nock, on n'a pas cessé d'analyser cette notion de conversion, si typique de la psychologie de l'homme hellénistique[63]. Le désir de se détourner des certitudes d'un mode de vie donné pour entrer dans un nouvel univers mental et réel, le besoin de se vider de tout ce qu'on possède pour recevoir une panoplie de concepts et d'instructions selon lesquels on pourra vivre une vie nouvelle dans une communauté idéale, est palpable dans le monde que nous étudions. Justin Martyr et Plotin, Augustin et Damascius offrent des exemples frappants – qui plus est, des exemples heureux – de cette ardente quête de l'homme pour un modèle de vie parfaite sur la terre des hommes et au-delà de celle-ci.

Cette quête, si caractéristique des temps, va de pair avec l'activité de la prédication. On prêche pour convertir et soustraire l'autre à la voie de l'erreur. Et plus les gens cherchent, plus l'esprit missionnaire et la pratique kérygmatique se répandent. C'est la loi du marché. C'est un indice aussi du climat d'insatisfaction morale et spirituelle qui caractérise ce monde globalisé. Mais, dans ce développement cyclique (ou plutôt en spirale) la ligne de démarcation entre conversion spontanée et volontaire et violence faite à la conscience d'autrui s'estompe de plus en plus. Et les méthodes de la propagande spirituelle constituent, corrélativement, un sujet de débat animé,

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où se lève une immense clameur de la foule, il ouvre les yeux : « il regarda, il cria, il se passionna, il emporta de là une frénésie qui l'excita, non seulement à revenir avec ceux qui l'avaient entraîné, mais à les devancer, et en entrainer d'autres » : *Conf.* 6.8, 13.

[61] Voir l'article de K.M. Coleman, « Fatal charades: Roman executions staged as mythological enactments », *JRS* 80 (1990), p. 44–73, pl. II–III.

[62] L'immolation de Peregrinus lors des jeux olympiques de 165 doit être interprétée dans ce sens. Et c'est le culte de sa mémoire, instauré au moment même de la mort du philosophe, qui provoque le courroux du rationaliste Lucien.

[63] *Conversion: the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford 1933; voir l'article N° XX dans ce volume.

comme en témoigne entre autres le courroux de Plotin contre le comportement des gnostiques qui venaient convertir dans son école.

Banalisée à travers le martyre et le prosélytisme, la violence est ambiante dans la société de l'Empire, ce monde limitrophe entre deux âges, qui continue à engendrer des mouvements rationnels et passéistes, comme la Seconde Sophistique, en même temps qu'il encourage l'homme nouveau à procéder à la démission de toute valeur anthropocentrique. Ce processus extrêmement complexe de transformation quasi-totale d'une anthropocratie en théocratie mérite d'être étudié en soi. L'entre-temps, déréglé et confus, entre deux manières diamétralement opposées de sentir, de penser et, finalement, de voir le monde est justement notre Antiquité tardive, qui possède la formule de la métamorphose.

VIII Fuyante identité

Période autonome donc ? Oui ! Cela fait déjà longtemps que l'Antiquité tardive s'est constituée en état souverain dans le domaine de l'historiographie. Le seul problème est celui de ses frontières. Comme nous venons de le voir, les experts en droit historiographique sont loin de s'accorder sur la superficie des portions à découper dans le territoire de deux empires jadis voisins : l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge. Mais la querelle entre les impérialistes et les partisans d'une politique modérée est sans substance. Fluide et insaisissable, cette entité que nous appelons conventionnellement « l'Antiquité tardive » est un tableau magique, une image qui se transforme sous nos propres yeux. Tantôt elle apparaît sous ses traits hellénistiques, tantôt elle exhibe son visage médiéval, et cette ambivalence – cette bipolarité constitutive, si l'on veut – forme l'élément le plus stable de son identité. C'est justement à cette dualité que se référait le grand Ernest Stein – figure tragique s'il en fut et pionnier inexplicablement oublié dans nos débats d'aujourd'hui – lorsqu'il définissait le Bas-Empire comme « l'Antiquité dans le Moyen âge »[64].

Essayons d'illustrer cette formule lapidaire en prenant comme exemple un être humain qui se tient au seuil de l'Antiquité tardive. Transportons-nous au moment de l'apogée de l'Empire romain – l'ère antonine – et allons à la rencontre d'un homme du monde, grand propriétaire foncier, grand voyageur et orateur célèbre. Il s'agit d'Aelius Aristide. Cet homme qui passe ses nuits – et souvent ses jours – en communication directe avec l'au-delà est en même temps le porte-parole le plus génial de la politique impériale, l'ardent missionnaire des valeurs séculières de Rome. Glorificateur du modèle antonin d'un libéralisme raisonné, Aristide chante dans deux oraisons charnières l'harmonie d'un état universel dont la variété est gérée par deux principes imbriqués : Rome sur le plan politique, Athènes sur le plan culturel. Mais en même temps, tel un moine byzantin, Aristide s'est voué de tout son être à

[64] E. Stein – J.R. Palanque, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. II, Paris 1949, p. XI.

Dieu et, en reconnaissance de ce fait, il s'est donné lui-même le nom de Théodore – « don de Dieu ».

Egalement incompris de ses descendants byzantins – qui ont lu (et admiré) ses discours politiques à la lumière de leurs propres besoins — et des historiens modernes qui l'ont relégué au domaine de la psychopathologie[65], Aristide-Théodore n'est pour nous qu'un symbole, un repère plus ou moins concret, dans notre quête pour l'Antiquité tardive. Laissons-le flotter à l'arrière-plan de notre horizon, et tâchons de découvrir des moyens de transport pour traverser cette contrée intermédiaire entre les deux pôles de notre voyage : l'Antiquité et le Moyen-Âge. Je propose pour ce but trois radeaux solidement bâtis, qui tout au long du voyage s'accostent et parfois se joignent pour former une seule plateforme flottante ; ce sont l'historiographie, les actes et canons des conciles ecclésiastiques (qui de plus en plus règlent la vie des individus dans ses détails les plus intimes) et les codes juridiques, qui leur font écho, trois échantillons d'écriture à l'aide desquels on peut progresser, en tout confort, d'une rive à l'autre. Et nos ports ? D'où nous embarquerons-nous, ou espérons-nous débarquer lors de cette aventure ?

Que le port d'embarquement soit Rome ou Alexandrie vers l'an 150, que le débarcadère final soit la Constantinople de Justinien ou la Ctésiphon des derniers Sassanides, le fait est sans importance. Ce qui compte plus que ces repères symboliques est la multitude des escales où l'on descend tout au long du voyage pour se divertir et se ravitailler[66]. Ce qui importe est la diversité des contacts humains que l'on fait sur place et les pacotilles qu'on emporte des ports d'escale comme autant de mémentos de rencontres et d'atmosphères vécues. Mais, lorsque finalement on se met au travail pour reconstruire, à partir de ces données, l'expérience du voyage, on découvre, non sans quelque surprise, l'importance croissante de la force centripète sur la périphérie plutôt que l'inverse[67]. Une romanité, redéfinie à partir des critères d'une monodoxie religieuse, contrôle tout mouvement dans les quartiers les plus éloignés de l'Empire. Toute personne qui ne se plie pas aux exigences de la religion d'État doit vivre dans la dissimulation ou s'enfuir hors du cercle de la *Romanitas*. Nestoriens ou platoniciens, les dissidents religieux qui choisissent l'exil ne font qu'affirmer, par cet acte désespéré, le fait qu'à leurs yeux la romanité égale l'orthodoxie du pouvoir.

Loin donc d'être un carcan imposé sur notre période par nos préoccupations modernes, l'impérialisme du religieux est là, dans les sources, subsumant le social

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[65] Pour les expressions « brainsick noodle » et « very interesting crank » et leur contexte, voir R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire A.D. 100–400*, New Haven-Londres 1984, p. 9.

[66] Comme étapes marquantes vers le triomphe de la monodoxie, j'ai choisi, dans mon livre *Vers la pensée unique : la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris 2010, l'édit de Décc, la politique éducationnelle de Julien, le Concile de Constantinople de 381, le Concile de Chalcédoine et l'affaire des Trois Chapitres.

[67] En faveur d'une perspective centrifuge de l'Antiquité tardive, Glen Bowersock (*cit.* n. 25) a réuni quelques exemples, illustrant plutôt la subjectivité du regard provincial sur l'Empire que la valeur universelle d'un modèle exégétique.

et le politique dans leur totalité. En guise de théologie ou de spectacle, de système de services sociaux qu'organise le nouvel évergétisme de l'Église ou de perspective tant sur le passé que sur l'avenir, la religion est l'inéluctable force qui, à partir du IV^e^ siècle au plus tard, meut tous les mécanismes de la vie publique et régit tous les aspects de la vie privée de l'Empire ; c'est l'arène des conflits verbaux et physiques d'une société en train de se convertir à un nouveau genre de vie et de pensée et de se calquer un imaginaire orienté vers « l'autre monde ». Qui plus est, c'est le cadre dans lequel agissent ses dissidents.

Avant de clore ces pensées liminaires, je voudrais m'arrêter sur une phrase de Wolf Liebeschuetz : « Bien sûr la société tardo-antique dans son ensemble n'est pas du tout comme la société post-moderne. Le rétrécissement radical des horizons intellectuels est le contraire de ce qui arrive aujourd'hui »[68]. C'est un point de vue. Personnellement je ne suis pas du tout persuadée que notre univers, avec ses orthodoxies politiques, son insistance passionnée sur les valeurs de la démocratie (mais quelle démocratie ?), et son *lip service* au dialogue libre soit si différent du monde de l'Antiquité finissante. On a beau insister sur les horizons vastes et variés de l'Antiquité tardive, la symbiose pacifique des courants divers et la cohabitation paisible des chrétiens et des païens au sein d'une même famille ; on a beau souligner la continuité des manières de vie et de pensée, la douceur et la modernité du discours patristique et finalement le plaisir désintéressé tiré des débats et des exercices herméneutiques[69]. Lorsque cette insistance est libre d'agressivité, elle revêt le caractère d'une apologie. Et s'il m'est permis de conclure ces réflexions en paraphrasant Oscar Wilde dans la Préface du « Portrait de Dorian Grey », je dirais que la vision optimiste de l'Antiquité tardive n'est que le refus de Caliban de regarder son visage dans le miroir.

This article was originally published in *Antiquité Tardive* 14 (2006), 311–24.

[68] « Late antiquity, the rejection of 'Decline', and multiculturalism » (cit. n. 38), p. 648–9.

[69] Voir *Cambridge Ancient History* vol. XIV (2000), p. 979 : « a pleasure in dialectic or hermeneutics for their own sake is palpable in some of the later theological literature ».

II

THE OECUMENISM OF IAMBLICHUS: LATENT KNOWLEDGE AND ITS AWAKENING

H. J. BLUMENTHAL and E. G. CLARK (EDS), *THE DIVINE IAMBLICHUS: PHILOSOPHER AND MAN OF GODS*. London, Bristol Classical Press, 1993. Pp. viii + 215. ISBN 1–85399–324–7. £30.00.

I. THE SEMINAL INFLUENCES

The Contrast with Porphyry

'The Syrian is full of God, the Phoenician a polymath' was the stock judgement on the respective merits of the 'divine' Iamblichus (I.) and the 'erudite' Porphyry among their philosophical progeny (David, *In Porph. Isag.* 4; Damascius, *In Phaed.* 1.172; Psellus in the Preliminary Scholion to the *De Mysteriis*). However, even if this allegedly Delphic aphorism has not encountered any serious opposition among either ancient or modern scholars, it is salutary to remember that each generation of critics loaded the words ἔνθους and πολυμαθής with a different semantic value. Indeed, the ever-changing meaning behind the words seems to form the natural point of departure for any consideration of I., an author whose theories have largely to be extricated from references made by his followers. Yet to what extent, one may legitimately ask, did these followers understand him?

I. was a revisionist thinker and a holy man and this difficult combination of genius and sanctity was the main reason for the reverent incomprehension shown towards I. by almost all those who came into contact with him. Indeed, a careful reading of those passages in their works which discuss the views of the 'divine' I. increasingly reveals a massive misunderstanding of the man's aims and achievement, and a foolish fascination both with the external tokens of his holiness and with the most ceremonial aspects of his theology (cf. below). If the epigoni cannot be taken as unqualified guides in this quest for I., it is essential to turn to what survives of his own writings, and try to trace the paramount influences on this original mind, while scanning the way in which they were absorbed. One would hope then to track down I. between the parameters of the influences on him and of the perpetually moving image held by his followers. Unfortunately such an approach was not adopted by the organizers of the conference from which the volume under review derives, with the result that this first collective work solely devoted to I. lacks root, focus, and perspective. Leaving aside their individual merits, the fourteen papers, which deal with technical philosophical problems, appear disjointed because they lack a framework and a rigorously defined point of reference. There is no link between the papers: indeed the discussion between scholars — which forms the only constructive function in the industry of conferences and which could have endowed this volume with some humanity, structure, and shape — is absent, and this heightens the impression left by these disparate voices of a *dialogue des sourds*.

Searching I.'s writings and the testimonies of those who knew him for clues regarding his development is not a straightforward process. For one thing, I. did not enjoy the questionable privilege of having his life written by a pupil, or indeed by anyone. What we know about him — and it is frustratingly little — comes from Eunapius, who was I.'s spiritual great-grandson. Eunapius preserved in his *Lives of Philosophers* a few anecdotes which ring true, hagiographical trivialities, and one or two details of school mythology. Among the latter is to be found the information that, after studying with Anatolius of Laodicea, I. 'attached himself to Porphyry' (v.1.2). This, together with the off-hand reference of I. himself to 'having heard' a certain theory from Porphyry, lumped together for the occasion with 'other' anonymous Platonists (Stobaeus, *Anth.* 1.49.37; cf. *In Tim.* fr. 64.24 (Dillon)), has been taken as evidence that I. was Porphyry's pupil, and from these 'data' have been drawn all kinds of significant conclusions regarding a life about which in fact we know virtually nothing. This is why it is important to consider these two passages in their proper historical context.

As regards Eunapius, we must never lose sight of the fact that he was a fervent pagan but no philosopher, writing with naive adoration the history of Neoplatonism at a time when this tradition had not yet taken flight but rather seemed in mortal danger under the impact both of internal inactivity and dissent and of outward pressure. For reasons of dynastic theology Eunapius wanted to believe, and have us believe, in a neat pedagogic relationship between Porphyry and I., which would automatically establish a linear spiritual descent between his own master and Plotinus, while securing at the same time a central position in this metaphysical chain for his hero, the emperor Julian. Eunapius' superbly simple scheme of the Platonic *diadoche*, Plotinus-Porphyry-Iamblichus-Aedesius-Julian-Chrysanthius-Eunapius, has — as was probably intended — given rise to a whole mythology of intellectual and

emotional relationships, which continues to haunt our approach to I.'s text: 'I. seems to have been concerned to an unusual degree with establishing himself by attacking and out-trumpeting his former teacher' is the verdict of an eminent scholar (D. J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (1989), 214), yet this is a verdict not borne out by the evidence. The mild indifference with which I. refers to Porphyry's lectures should be taken as a clue to the kind of world in which these people moved.

Men like Justin Martyr, Plotinus, or Julian did not tour the world with a view to gathering qualifications of professionalism or even knowledge, but in order to discover the one teacher who would open up for them the road to spiritual fulfilment. This was a free world in which people were not chained to the feet of masters who were mere instruments of a degree-conferring system. Consequently, if someone describes himself as a 'pupil', this amounts to more than a fortuitous relationship with the master, as Plotinus' confession of his lengthy search for the ideal teacher attests (*V.Plot.* 3.7–13). It is in this sense of a real tutorial bond that, despite what Eunapius claims, I. never recognized Porphyry as his master, and did not feel any great sadness or bitterness at this fact. Nor did Porphyry, who addressed to his younger contemporary an exhaustive questionnaire on divination and related issues in the genuine hope of receiving an answer from the man he now recognized as the foremost authority on the subject (for the date of this correspondence, *JRS* 83 (1993), 116 n. 13, 118 n. 30).

Both the list of questions and the list of answers — the *Letter to Anebo* and the *De Mysteriis* (*DM*) — reveal the relationship between the two men in its true light. The image of Porphyry conveyed by his questionnaire is that of a man lacking in self-confidence and imagination, with an analytical mind and a naive avidity for knowledge. Already set before our eyes by Plotinus (*V.Plot.* 11.12–18; 13.11–18), this picture is in sharp contrast to the portrait of I. yielded by the *DM*: a self-possessed, patient, authoritative, and exceptionally understanding teacher, who offers answers and corrective insights to a student's agonizing questions. I. was already in the conscience of his contemporaries a major religious reformer, endowed with all the formal and essential characteristics of a prophet. An acute sense of cosmic divinity (Eunapius, *VP* v.1.12–15) and a sure instinct for what was significant in tradition irrespective of its origin enabled him to become an oecumenical exegete and a holy man of ample fame, who performed miracles if put under pressure by his disciples (Eunapius, *VP* v.2.2–9; cf. v.1.7–11), but, more importantly, attempted to teach them how to animate a newly structured Platonic and Pythagorean frame of thought by breathing into it Oriental fervour. The way in which this important task was carried out is not difficult to reconstruct. As O'Meara has shown (*Pythagoras Revived*, 30–105), the ten stages of the Iamblichan road to perfection are faithfully mirrored in the ten books of his substantially extant Περὶ τῆς Πυθαγορικῆς αἱρέσεως which should be treated as a single work if a fuller understanding of I. as a teacher, rather than a mere scholar, is to be achieved.

From Apamea to Alexandria and Back

If Porphyry the polymath did not make an impact on I., the illustrious dead — ever associated with particular holy places — proved surer guides. Numenius of Apamea, who had shown in a critical — almost libellous — history of philosophy that Plato's self-appointed successors had perverted his doctrines, was one such influence. Numenius' further association of Plato and Pythagoras, and his even bolder spiritual promiscuity in the direction of Jewish religion, provided important insights for I. Acquainted with Numenius primarily through Amelius (cf. L. Brisson, 'Amélius: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa doctrine, son style', *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987), 793–860), I. seems to have linked the two men as thinkers and successive epicentres of a spiritual circle active in Apamea (cf. the expression οἱ ἀμφὶ Ἀμέλιον (*In Tim.* fr. 57)) whose activities and fame cannot have been unconnected with I.'s ultimate choice of Apamea as his base. Beyond this complex association it would be worth exploring how I.'s relationship with Numenius alone was articulated. An example of how this can be done has already been set by O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 10–14 and *passim*. Yet, despite recent interest in Numenius' philosophical position (M. Frede, 'Numenius', *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987), 1034–75 and K. Alt, *Weltflucht und Weltbejahung: zur Frage des Dualismus bei Plutarch, Numenius, Plotin* (1993)), much basic research remains to be done on his relationship to his sources and his representation by later authors, if I.'s background, Apamean connection, and peculiar sense of intellectual tolerance are to be better understood.

A linear descendant of the priest-kings of Emesa, many of whom bore the same name as himself, Ya-mlik-u (May he rule!) was born around A.D. 245 and brought up in a way which bred in him a taste for a simple and traditional life-style (Eunapius, *VP* v.1.6.). Intellectual, or rather spiritual, curiosity drove him to seek knowledge away from home and it can be inferred that he visited Alexandria and Rome, where he became acquainted with the latest trends in Hellenistic philosophy. We know, for example, that Plotinus' circle supplied I. with a daughter-in-law, wife of a son named after Plato's father (details in Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (1973), 6–7). May one therefore suspect that during his stay in Rome, far from sitting at the feet of Plotinus' pupils, I.

impressed some at least of the members of the now headless spiritual community to the point that they followed him back, then or later, to his native Syria?

If Rome left no trace on I.'s personality, Alexandria seems to have shaped it. In that important centre of Pythagoreanism and mathematical research I. encountered his second seminal influence when Anatolius of Laodicea introduced him to Nichomachus of Gerasa's arithmetic theology, not least through his own exegesis of the metaphysics of numbers. The connections between the Pythagorean Nichomachus and the Aristotelian Anatolius, a remarkable scholar and man of action who had the see of Laodicea thrust upon him (Eusebius, *H.E.* VII.32.6–13, 20–21), have been totally disregarded up to now. If further pursued, they might lead us to understand better both the reasons for I.'s lack of polemical interest in Christianity and the ways by which he synthesized various lines of thinking and feeling into one indisoluble whole.

In his biographical sketches of I. Dillon allows no space for an Alexandrian stay, and assumes that he studied with Anatolius in Caesarea ('Iamblichus of Chalcis', *ANRW* II.36.2 (1987), 867). Larsen, on the other hand, postulates an important Alexandrian — even Egyptian — phase in I.'s life ('La place de Jamblique dans la philosophie antique tardive', *Entretiens Hardt* XXI (1975), 24), contemplating a period of ten to twenty years spent in Alexandria during I.'s formative years before he ever visited the West. I would suggest that it is not at all unlikely that, after meeting Porphyry and during his residence in Alexandria, I. received the *Letter to Anebo*, to which he replied with a dissertation steeped in the influences to which he was most prominently exposed at the time.

A better documented influence on I. is the 'Hermetic Way', and in this respect at least the christening by Ficino of Abamon's reply to Porphyry as *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum et Assyriorum* (in that order), coupled with the fact that we owe to Ficino a Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1471), may not be the misnomer it is generally proclaimed to be. In *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), G. Fowden made a systematic and convincing attempt to steer us away from Festugière's Hellenocentric interpretation of the Hermetica by placing them in their natural historical and social context; he has warned us against the danger of overestimating the popular character of this 'practical spiritual "way"' (p. xvi) and, more significantly, has highlighted the role of I. as an adept of Hermetic doctrine, though limiting the Hermetic influence on him to his understanding of theurgy. This task had already been partly undertaken by W. Scott who, while rejecting I.'s authorship of the *DM*, included substantial passages of the work in his Hermetic testimonia (*Hermetica* IV (1936), 28–103). Moreover, Ph. Derchain has underlined 'Abammon's' profound understanding of the Egyptian religion, independently of the Hermetic Way ('Pseudo-Jamblique ou Abammon?', *Chronique d'Egypte* 76 (1963), 220–6). To the present reviewer's mind, I. drew much more from Egypt in general and the Hermetic milieu in particular than has ever been suspected, as converging items of evidence suggest.

In the *DM* Hermes is the sole and incontestable τῶν λόγων ἡγεμών (I.1.1), responsible for the divine synthesis of Chaldaean, Hermetic, Greek, and popular religion into a meaningful whole (*DM* I.1.4–5; VI.7). Indeed, one of I.'s primary achievements is to have shown how his contemporary Hermetic literature — so diverse in style and content (*DM* VIII.4.265, I.260, and VI.5) — had absorbed much that was of Greek and Hellenistic origin without sacrificing its essentially Egyptian character (*DM* VIII.5; cf. VII.5.258). This sense of deep historical continuity, mirroring the unity of the physical universe beneath its apparent diversification, is a lesson that I. learned in the Hermetic gatherings 'from our contemporary sages' (*DM* VIII.1.260). This uninterrupted oral transmission of divine knowledge (*DM* X.7.293) had as its ultimate objective man's union with God, as I. was at pains to explain to Porphyry (*DM* VIII.4.267, 6–7; X.5–6). Unaltered from time immemorial in both its doctrinal core and its ritual dress, the Hermetic way seemed to I. a surer road to God than the ever innovatory way of the inconstant Greeks — their ἄστατος εὑρεσιλογία (*DM* VII.5.258–9) — and it is not a mere coincidence that in his attack on Greek superficiality, trendiness, and lawlessness I. reproduces the stern language of *CH* XVI,1–2.

Did I. set up in Alexandria his own Hermetic circle? The story of Alypius, as related by Eunapius (*VP* V.3), may contain more clues than is usually realized. An Alexandrian who lived and died in his native city, Alypius was a famous teacher, but his teaching was oral and he never published anything — a reason which Eunapius seems to put forward, somewhat incongruously, for the constant leak of students towards I. 'As the renown of both men increased commensurately, they chanced upon one another or met like stars in their course', while a huge audience gathered to listen to them. Alypius seems to have censured I. for his wealth, and, after overcoming his initial irritation, I. is said to have recognized in him an important fellow-teacher and to have written his biography.

If I.'s physical connection with Alexandria can only be a hypothesis, his link with the Way of Hermes as both theory and practice is beyond doubt (as realized by Proclus, *In Tim.* 117d (I, 386,9–13)). Festugière felt the need to include in his *Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* III (1953) an Appendix (177–264) with a translation of the substantial fragments of I.'s *de anima* preserved in Stobaeus, but did not wonder why the discourses of Isis to her son Horus (Stobaeus, *Anth.* I.385–414 and 458–472) invariably occur immediately after the long Iamblichan extracts *On the Soul*. Whether this is a simple coincidence or an indication that the Hermetic aretalogies were transmitted by I. as the quintessence of divine wisdom on cosmological issues, is a matter which invites philological research.

The fundamental difficulty in our attempt to approach I. lies in the lack of an even remotely adequate edition of his work. This point is thankfully brought out in the present collection of papers by both H.-D. Saffrey and Anne Sheppard with reference to the recent edition by Des Places of the *DM* (1966, 1989), the only work of I. which survives in its entirety. After a careful re-reading of the work as a point-by-point answer to Porphyry's questions, Saffrey states: 'ayant reconnu cette division du texte, j'ai eu l'agréable surprise de découvrir que c'est aussi de cette façon que Marsile Ficin a compris et organisé cette suite d'apories avec leurs solutions' (155). The reference is to Ficino's edition of 1497! Wishing to show the direct dependence of I. on Plato on the subject of inspiration, Anne Sheppard has analysed a short section of the *DM* (III.4–8) only to find out that the manner in which this part of the Iamblichan treatise has been divided by Des Places has contributed considerably towards obscuring its structure and meaning (142).

Behind this technical incompetence lies the more general incomprehension of the nature of the *DM* both as literary form (and here Saffrey's comments are of relevance) and as conceptual whole. This incomprehension is heightened by a refusal to view what remains of I.'s writings as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle capable of conveying a meaningful message if even partially reconstructed. With one notable exception, to be discussed in the final part of this review, the papers in the volume themselves offer a good illustration of this point, suffering as they do from a self-imposed 'restricted view'. For instead of taking into consideration all we know by I. on a subject, they limit themselves to one work or fraction of a work. It is a great mystery to me why the letters of I., offering his views on a variety of moral and metaphysical questions in a direct style, have not been exploited (except to a very limited extent by O'Meara). The same applies to the Stobaean fragments of the *de anima*, which throw light on I.'s psychology and soteriology, while giving valuable insights into his scholarly method.

But the main fault in this collection of disparate articles is the assumption — elevated in the Introduction to a methodological principle — that it is possible to reconstruct I.'s system from an uncritical reading of references to him in the works of 'Proclus, Damascius, Simplicius, and other Neoplatonist commentators of the last century of classical antiquity' (1). This notion rests on the extraordinarily optimistic, but doubly fragile, hypothesis that not only did I.'s epigoni understand what he had to say and were able to convey it to their students, but also that the students whose notes we read in many cases were endowed with an equal degree of intelligence. A closer examination of Proclus' work has led me to the conclusion that, while lavishing his admiration on I., Proclus completely misunderstood his metaphysics and methodology (*JRS* 83 (1993), 128–9, with footnotes). My surprise grew as I gradually discovered that the Proclean approach to I. had been applied by most Neoplatonists with disastrous results for the transmission of I.'s legacy (ibid., 117), a complication which is not made any easier by the fact that I.'s successors thought of themselves as absolutely faithful followers of and spokesmen for his philosophical theory and practice (ibid., *passim*). And, while I am by no means saying that we cannot be assisted in a tentative reconstruction of I.'s thoughtworld by his self-appointed successors' understanding of it, I would maintain that such a task can be undertaken only after the 'sources' for I. have been thoroughly examined and understood in themselves and in connection with each other.

Such an examination might show that, whereas between Proclus and I. there is an unbridgeable gulf of incomprehension, the key for retrieving something of I.'s essence might be held by Damascius. That Damascius' 'works refute various positions in Proclus by returning to certain principles of Iamblichus' (H.-D. Saffrey, 'Neoplatonic spirituality. II. From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius', in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (1986), 264) has been for some time widely acknowledged (cf. C. Steel, *The Changing Self* (1978), 118 and *passim*). But how and why this is done has to be systematically explored if we are to reach back to I. beyond the stumbling block of Proclus. Indeed what seems to have happened is that Proclus (perhaps with some help from Syrianus?) created an image of I. which was unwittingly taken over by the epigoni with the single exception of Damascius and possibly his master Isidore (for which cf. *V.Isid.* fr. 77). Indeed, as Damascius' pupil, Simplicius, understood, his master 'did not hesitate to oppose many of Proclus' doctrines because of his industriousness and also his appreciation of I.'s ideas' (*CAG* IX. 795, 15–17). Simplicius here is, of course, referring to Damascius' rigorous aporetic methodology and at the same time to his *reductio ad absurdum* of all dialectic, his extraordinary capacity for rising above analysis in inspired poetic flights. Both these trends are superbly exemplified in Damascius' most original work, his systematic treatise *On the First Principles* — now available in a handy edition with often helpful commentary (Les Belles Lettres, I–III, 1986–91) — where he vigorously reasserts I.'s metaphysics against the interpretation of 'the philosophers' (Syrianus and Proclus) and at the same time provides a Neoplatonic theoretical framework for all revealed theologies, ancient and modern, Greek and barbarian. But to return on a more practical level to the extremely important theme of how I. can be disentangled from his followers, two articles in the collection show how the use of individual works by later authors *in conjunction with* Iamblichan texts may yield fruitful results on specific issues.

In 'Giamblico nel "Commentario alla Metafisica" di Siriano' (173–200), Cardullo shows, by a systematic analysis of relevant passages in Syrianus' Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and a close study of a parallel section in the *DM*, how Syrianus followed I. in his Pythagoreanization of philosophy and mathematization of reality away from Plotinus. By supplying specific evidence on this subject, Cardullo lends support to the thesis formulated by O'Meara in *Pythagoras Revived*. This useful book assesses the importance of the Pythagorean tradition and more specifically of 'arithmetic theology' in the history of later antique thought from Nichomachus of Gerasa to Proclus, while aptly emphasizing the decisive role played in this process by I. If the tone, nuance, and emphasis are not always correct, the very promotion of such a massive theme in the discussion of Neoplatonism is worthy of our gratitude. Another instance of a methodologically aware article in our collection is John Finamore's 'Iamblichus on light and the transparent' (55–64). By making intelligent use of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* in connection with *DM* Book III, the author clarifies our understanding of I.'s notion of light and divine illumination, while showing at the same time how the seemingly conflicting views of Plato and Aristotle on the matter of light were reconciled by I.

An uncritical assumption that the philosophers who succeeded I. understood and represented him more or less objectively is not the only unfortunate effect that derives from grouping together 'the later Neoplatonists' (as on p. 79). This artificial congregation of individuals who differed substantially in the way they perceived nature and tradition is at the root of a much more serious methodological fallacy, one that is very difficult to castigate as it is firmly founded on current scholarly orthodoxy — the excessive use of analysis. An analytical approach may yield fruitful results when applied to Porphyry, Proclus, or Simplicius who are themselves analytical thinkers; conversely, such an approach can prove disastrous to the understanding of Plotinus, I., or Damascius, as the most recent commentator on Damascius has sensed, without nevertheless daring to take the decisive step away from analysis. It is, however, worth quoting his wise and sensitive words: 'dans le système logico-rationnel de notre pensée divisée, toute notion spéculative d'un principe absolu demeure littéralement ἄπορος sans passage, sans chemin, sans issue, et qu'à son sujet tout le raisonnement s'autodétruit. (. . .) Pour sortir de l'impasse (ἀπορία) dans laquelle nous enferme la logique du tout, il faut briser le tout et sa logique' (J. Combes, 'Damascius, ou la pensée de l'origine', in J. Duffy and J. Peradotto (eds), *Gonimos in honour of L. G. Westerink* (1988), 92).

These considerations should serve us as a guiding principle when attempting to approach thinkers like Damascius or I. Above all we must stop thinking in terms of a 'Schule' — a nefarious notion sown in the field of Neoplatonic studies by Praechter in 1910 ('Richtungen und Schulen in Neuplatonismus', *Genethliakon für Karl Robert* (1910), 105–56 = repr. *Kleine Schriften* (1973)) and flourishing ever since. Indeed the work of demolition in both the institutional and the theoretical framework of Neoplatonism which must precede any constructive task as regards I., is enormous, and the two ghosts to be exorcised straightaway, if we are to achieve a more direct contact with I. and his world, are Praechter with his Germanic mania for Schools, and Dodds with his post-Enlightenment rationalism. The disappearance of modern categories and habits of thought as well as long-established scholastic divisions will then follow naturally. So far I. has constituted the preserve of philologically-minded philosophers: he should — as I will attempt to argue in the final part of this review — become the concern of theologically-minded historians, of people who are not obsessed with the use of words, any more than he was himself (cf. I.'s ironic reference to 'the officiousness of the word' (*In Tim.* fr. 9) to describe the literal approach to Plato).

III. METHODOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE

If the metaphysical core of Hermeticism proved a major source of inspiration for I., suggesting to him a methodology of divine ascent, the institutional framework of the Hermetic circles that he may have frequented in Egypt would have provided him with the ideal model for a spiritual gathering. Indeed, both the informality of I.'s circle — with its drinking-parties, religious promenades to holy sites in the Syrian countryside, and more secular excursions to bathing-stations — and its uncommon religious fervour — with the pupils continuously pestering the master for miracles and other tokens of sanctity — suggest the outlines of a loose Hermetic community rather than the more rigid framework of a philosophical school. This impression is considerably strengthened by the letters written by I. to his pupils and by at least one pupil to him, which speak of an exceptionally intense relationship in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual terms.

In his treatise *On the Soul*, I. postulates that the saviour souls which are sent down by the gods to guide humanity towards its goal of perfection are effortlessly aware of their divine status and thus constitute the means by which the gods reveal themselves to humanity (Stobaeus, *Anth.* 1.378–9). As an example of such a cosmic saviour, I. puts forward Pythagoras, whom he presents not so much as a historical figure but rather as the archetype towards which we must all strive. Gillian Clark, who has grasped the didactic intent of I.'s book *On the Pythagorean Life*, notes pertinently in the Introduction to

her recent translation of this work that it 'is chiefly concerned with lifestyle and human relationships and I.'s students could have practised most of what he preached' (*Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Life*, (1989), xvi). This is why, instead of composing like Porphyry a biography of Pythagoras, where the emphasis would have been on the past rather than the present, I. gave his followers an *imitatio Pythagorae*, guidelines 'on the Pythagorean Life', of which he himself was the living embodiment. This is certainly how his ἐρασταί viewed him (for the expression, Ps.Julian, *Epp.* 187.405b, 184.419d): a doctor of souls (Ps.Julian, 187.406d), 'the universal blessing of the Hellenes' (ibid., 406e), and even 'the one singled out to be the saviour of humanity as a whole' (Ps. Julian, 181.449b). Some of them (his favourite Sopater, Dexippus, and Julian, among others whose identity escapes us) went away to wield worldly power, sometimes with fatal results, while others spread his teaching as scholars and holy men in the traditional centres of learning of the eastern Mediterranean. Far from 'the sacred hearth' (Ps. Julian, 183.448b) of Apamea, they thought of their elderly master (from Ps. Julian, 187,407 it can be inferred that I. is an oldish, though by no means decrepit man in 314/15) in his Syrian abode as 'an Eastern Spring' (ἑῷον ἔαρ, Ps. Julian, 185.438d) or rather a Sun whose life-giving rays reached out to warm and illuminate them even in their absence from him (Ps. Julian, *Ep.* 187.406d).

The letters of Pseudo-Julian — a high official of Licinius' court — must at last be reconsidered side-by-side with I.'s own letters to his other pupils rather than being viewed as rhetorical exercises. What will emerge from this combined reading will be not so much the figure of a hierophant, but that of an eminently approachable holy man with feet firmly rooted on the ground. We are dealing with a broad-minded public figure, in the tradition of a Plutarch or a Plotinus, offering advice and admonition on social, moral, political, and even trivial personal matters to a wide circle of friends and pupils. If we stop to listen to what I. has to tell Sopater on the education of children we will indeed hear a wise, charming, and benign grandfather-figure whose unshakable self-confidence derives from his knowledge of the deep harmony between man's soul and the world. The ultimate message broadcast from his Syrian home by this optimistic prophet who celebrated Pleasure as a goddess (Damascius, *In Phil.* 19.5) is that the individual soul is the absolute master of its own destiny in a wholly good cosmos.

Primarily a teacher for those who came in direct contact with him, I. left his mark on the history of Neoplatonism as much in methodological as in thematic terms. For he is both the inventor of the Commentary on a fixed curriculum, as practised by late antique and medieval scholars in pagan, Christian, and Islamic lands, and by the same token the man who finally showed that paganism is a revealed religion of potentially universal appeal firmly based on the twin foundations of a 'recommended' oral and written tradition. Once fixed by him, the curriculum of Neoplatonic studies, or more precisely the Scriptures of Hellenism, remained unchanged well into medieval times. What I would choose to emphasize, however, as far as the historical facts of I.'s life are concerned, is his dual decision not to translate his royal name into Greek and to return to the East after his western peregrinations in order to live and teach in his ancestral domains. In both these choices I. was highly atypical among late antique intellectuals both before and after him.

An assessment of I.'s intellectual achievement (which should not be viewed as separate from his teaching in both its practical and theoretical aspects) will be difficult to produce, but the prognostics on that front are auspicious. In his excellent article in the present collection, 'The geometry of grace: a Pythagorean approach to theurgy' (116–37), Gregory Shaw offers us I.'s carefully mapped out psychology and soteriology in a manner as clear and direct as it is bold and original. It should serve as a methodological model in the study of the great issues of Iamblichan Neoplatonism. Drawing abundantly and intelligently on most of his writings, Shaw displays before our eyes I.'s complementary methodologies without forcing the diverse evidence. I would add a small point, that the material demons who must be ritually placated before the soul may take flight (123) are the allegorized human passions which have to be mildly indulged.

Our understanding of how I. conceived of philosophical entities, such as space, time and number, may benefit from a systematic comparative study of these concepts in several individual philosophers and theologians from Antonine to Justinianic times. A successful attempt along these lines has already been made by S. Sambursky (*The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism* (1982)) and, though his limitation of his research to only one source (Simplicius' Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*) may have been unnecessarily restrictive, the results yielded are significant for Iamblichan scholarship (an excellent contribution to the same issue had already been made by Philippe Hoffmann, 'Jamblique exegète du pythagoricien Archytas: trois originalités d'une doctrine de temps', *Les études philosophiques* 35 (1980), 307–23). Sambursky's conclusion that Damascius' conception of *topos* is complementary to the Iamblichan notion which associated place and matter adds strength to the emerging pattern of the compatibility of the two Syrians. And, though I am not impressed by the resemblance between I.'s wording and the Biblical parallels adduced by Sambursky, his more general claim that I.'s concept of space 'was a synthesis of Stoic, Jewish and Neopythagorian ideas' (16) certainly fits the broader framework of I.'s thought.

Next to philology, other disciplines must be drawn on if we are to ressurect I.'s world, understand how late Roman paganism changed, and appreciate the centrality to it of theological issues not just for

the educated, but for everybody. The geographical dimension, which has been so brilliantly exploited by French historians, must assume its full importance in this search, while archaeology and social anthropology must be brought into play (for the changed perspective on late antique Neoplatonism resulting from archaeological finds and their interpretation, cf. J. and J. Ch. Balty, 'Un programme philosophique sous la cathédrale de l'est: l'ensemble néo-platonicien de l'empereur Julien', *Texte et image. Actes du Colloque international de Chantilly* (1984), 167–86; R. R. R. Smith, 'Late Roman philosopher portraits from Aprhodisias', *JRS* 80 (1990), 127–55; P. Castren (ed.), *Post-Herulian Athens* (1994), and P. Athanassiadi, 'Persecution and response in late paganism: the evidence of Damascius', *JHS* 113 (1993), 23). The diachronic continuity both in the landscape and in social structures and religious habits between his time and today is still greater in the part of the world where I. lived than in the northern provinces of the Roman *oikoumene* and beyond. These are factors to be taken into consideration, not during hasty field-trips, but by the constant combined effort of our senses, mind, and imagination. We must stop being model-ridden anthropologists and attempt to approach I. in the manner of his own pupils, putting all our mental and physical resources at the service of this contact. What we need is empathy with the subject and not pedantry. Indeed the right approach to I. has been expressed — albeit apophatically — by a fine Islamic scholar who remarked, on the subject of those who find the Koran self-contradictory and illogical, that it is not possible 'to measure the ocean of prophetic eloquence with the thimble of pedestrian analysis' (A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (1964), xi).

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III

Hellenism: a Theological Koine

What is Hellenism? What is a koine? When and where does the phenomenon described in the title occur? Four intertwined questions to which the answers can hardly be simple and straightforward. For this reason I propose to begin with something fairly uncontroversial – the technical term 'koine' – and then, as the argument progresses, to bring in evidence from various areas, and attempt to elaborate and interpret it in the light of my theme.

Towards a religious koine

The feminine form of an adjective meaning common, ordinary, regular, the word κοινὴ was used in Hellenistic times to describe a Greek free of archaisms and dialectical peculiarities. Emerging as a lingua franca in the late fourth century BC, this *koine* or common language, which was based on the Attic dialect, spread rapidly across the Greater Mediterranean. The military conquest of the Middle East – arrogantly equated by its new masters with the *oikoumene*, that is the entire inhabited world – was thus complemented by an act of linguistic imperialism, something which had not occurred with the preceding Achaemenid empire, where Aramaic – and not Persian! – had been the lingua franca.[1] But here things become complicated. For the language was to a limited extent only the vehicle of the metropolitan culture. In fact, rather as with today's 'computerspeak', the linguistic instrument of the Greeks soon became, on their own lips too, so littered with grammatical and syntactical mistakes – what contemporaries named 'barbarisms' and 'solecisms' – that this maltreatment of the mother tongue provoked a reaction among purists. A whole new class, the grammarians, was born and the word 'Hellenismos', meaning the correct use of the Greek language, came into being as a term of protest, while a whole set of Rules of Hellenism – 'Κανόνες 'Ελληνισμοῦ' – was invented to regulate the use of Greek.[2] At the same time, among oriental and, more specifically, Jewish, élites, the word 'Ελληνισμὸς came to mean in a more general sense

[1] On the complicated linguistics of the Achaemenid empire, see Lewis 1994.

[2] For a first full definition of the correct use of the Greek language, Aristotle, Rhet. III,5; cf. J. Stroux, 1913, De Theophrasti virtutibus dicendi, Pars I, Leipzig, 13 ff.

the imitation of a Greek way of life. The Ἑλληνισταί, as we know them from the Bible, were the traitors to their own spiritual and cultural heritage – the renegades *par excellence* (*Macc.*2:4).

If the linguistic *koine* is a relatively straightforward structure – it accommodated very few foreign words, while coining Greek terms to describe phenomena and situations first encountered in its new milieu – the spiritual *koine*, which emerged slowly and painfully in the conquered lands, can be broadly defined as obeying a reverse movement, since it resulted from an invasion, or (to put it more irenically) from a fertilization, of the metropolitan by the ethnic. This however should not surprise us. For Orientalism was born in Greece.

Long before the passage of Alexander to the East, Plato had immortalized the attitude by gleefully reporting the patronizing words of the Egyptian priest to the foremost Athenian legislator: 'Oh Solon, Solon, you Greeks are eternal children, and no Greek ever grows old' (*Tim.* 22b). The old and the wise were the Orientals (not in a strictly geographical but in a cultural sense); and those among the Greeks who had reached a degree of sophistication as scientists, religious thinkers or holy men had been formed in the East. This was an axiom. Democritus was said to have studied in Egypt, Persia, Chaldaea, India and Ethiopia (Diogenes Laertius IX, 35, quoting earlier sources), while the very first man to call himself a 'philosopher' (which means a friend of wisdom rather than a wise man), Pythagoras, had acquired all his learning in the East. Indeed by late antiquity his biographers make his birthplace Sidon in Phoenicia and not Samos (Iamblichus *VP* 7), no doubt in order to bolster Pythagoras' credentials to wisdom. One could multiply the examples which illustrate the belief that the philosophy of the Barbarians was superior to that of the Greeks.

The ambiguous word 'Barbarian' had a wholly positive meaning on the lips of a Greek when applied to occult wisdom, sanctity or science. For it was coterminous with great antiquity, and hence with truth, indeed divinely revealed truth. And when, in Hellenistic times, a closer – and more profound – contact was established between Greeks and Orientals, at least in an urban milieu, this attitude engendered several clichés. Orientalism – or more poetically 'le mirage oriental'[3] – was made up of a set of credos of stark simplicity: God had revealed the secrets of the cosmos to the ancient nations of the East: in the words of Numenius, who lived in the 2nd century AD, 'the rituals, the

[3] Launched by Festugière in the 1940s (1944, I,10), the expression has become something of a cliché.

doctrines and the initiations of the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi and the Egyptians' were the very touchstones of truth, (fr. 1a). Moreover, God had spoken to these nations in their own tongue; hence the premise of sacred languages, in which the gods could be more effectively invoked, since they had themselves handed down the very words of the prayers at the same time as they had revealed the ritual acts according to which they could best be approached.[4] As Iamblichus wrote to Porphyry at the close of the third century of the Christian era, 'since the Egyptians are the first people with whom the gods communicated, the gods are pleased to be invoked according to the rites of the Egyptians' (DM VII.5, 258).

Another major theme comes into play here: that of the elect. By choosing a particular individual as the messenger of metaphysical truth, the gods invested with sanctity not only the individual prophet and his language, but also his lineage. A holy caste is thus created whose duty is to perpetuate the divine revelation by guarding and defending it against all innovation. The antiquity, exclusiveness and exoticism of all this – divine revelation, prophet, sacred caste, holy language – deeply impressed the Greeks, for whom, as for all ancient peoples, innovation – καινοτομία – was a purely negative concept. Their admiration for the esoteric wisdom of the Orient was further heightened by the factor of incomprehension, for the Greeks, like all self-respecting colonialists, did not speak foreign languages. It was for the Orientals to acquire the master tongue, the *koine*, and this is indeed what the learned clergy of Egypt and Babylon did straightaway.

A priest of Ammon-Re at Heliopolis with the impressive name Manetho or Truth of Thoth, and the Babylonian Berossus, whose name seems to mean 'Bel is his shepherd', undertook to open up for the Greeks the treasures of their respective national and spiritual heritages. Berossus and Manetho wrote in Greek, putting across the Babylonian and the Egyptian point of view of their past, and by the same token discrediting the ethnographic approach with which the Greeks had so far been familiar through the writings of such authors as Herodotus and Hecataeus. The guided tour to the magic of the East given by the natives themselves, the revelation of the mystical truth by the insider, at once exposed all the ignorance of Herodotus,[5] a theme which soon evolved into a topos, and

[4] By the fifth century AD, if not before, belief in the intrinsic sanctity of the Hebrew language reaches an extreme whereby the very letters of the alphabet are considered as being holy in themselves, with each letter having a symbolic meaning and each stroke made by the scribe having a special significance: Goodman 1994, 99-101.

[5] It was another outsider, Josephus, who as a Jew proficient in Greek undertook to expose the superficial-

caused a Saidian outcry against Orientalism. The truth could only be had from the horse's mouth.

This claim is responsible for the great paradox which lies at the heart of the religious synthesis of late antiquity. Not only theologians, but the native gods themselves learn Greek and begin to deliver their revelations according to the thought-patterns of Hellenism, while disparaging and denigrating both the language and the methodologies of the Greeks – a charming eccentricity of which the discourse of Imhotep-Asclepius to King Ammon offers a striking illustration:

> *insofar as it lies within your own power – and you are all-powerful, o king – keep this discourse far from translation, so that these great mysteries never come into the hands of the Greeks, and their arrogant manner of speech, at once flaccid and dandified, extinguishes the nobility, the strength and the efficacity of the words. For the Greeks, o king, have empty words productive of rational proof, and this is what Greek philosophy is – a babble of words – whereas we do not use words, but sounds, active and efficacious* (Herm. XVI.2).

Written directly in Greek, this declaration belongs to that diffuse and ubiquitous theosophical tradition which is known as the revelation of Hermes Trismegistus. The vast pseudepigraphic literature which goes under the name of the Thrice Great Hermes, ranging from the magical to the spiritual, was produced in the first centuries of our era and constitutes one of the many ways to salvation invented and fervently embraced by the men and women of late antiquity.

In the 2nd century AD another 'barbarian' revelation – the Chaldaean Oracles – reached mankind in the form of Greek verse. Propagating the superiority of the language and of the spiritual tradition of the Babylonian gods over their Greek counterparts, the Chaldaean Oracles were to serve the Neoplatonists as their scriptures. The man who was mainly responsible for the adoption of this new revelation as the holy book of regenerated Platonism, Iamblichus of Apamea, was a Syrian who had dabbled in, among other things, Hermetic wisdom (Athanassiadi 1995, 246). As an adept of the doctrine of the inherent sanctity of the Oriental tongues and of their magic power, Iamblichus was to launch around the year 300 the following manifesto:

> *One must preserve the form of ancient prayers as if they were inviolate sanctuar-*

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ity of Greek orientalism: cf. Josephus, *App.* I. 73: 'Manetho who convicts Herodotus of being misled through ignorance on many points of Egyptian history', Μανέθων ὅς καί πολλὰ τὸν Ἡρόδοτον ἐλέγχει τῶν Αἰγυπτιακῶν ὑπ' ἀγνοίας ἐψευσμένον.

ies, neither subtracting from them nor adding anything whatever from elsewhere. For I suppose this too is a reason why words and prayers have now lost their power, as they never stop being altered on account of the criminal inventiveness of the Greeks. For the Greeks are trendy by nature, eager to be carried off in any direction as they lack ballast. Nor do they preserve whatever they receive from other traditions but, immediately rejecting it, they transform everything according to their unstable habit of always seeking the latest jargon (*DM* VII.5.259).

Written in Greek by the man who revolutionized Greek philosophy, these words fall within a pattern initiated, as we have seen, at the dawn of the Hellenistic era by men like Berossus and Manetho and sanctioned by the Greeks and the Hellenized Orientals who were the inventors and the users of the theological *koine* of late antiquity. And no one can show us more effectively than Hermes Trismegistus how this synthesis came about.

The divine logos

A typical product of a Hellenistic divine synthesis (a common process that we call *theocrasy*, that is mixing of divinities) between on the one hand the Egyptian Thoth, inventor of writing and patron of sacred wisdom, and on the other his Greek equivalent, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, the thrice-great Hermes was neither Egyptian nor Greek, but an ubiquitous Hellenistic god-logos who brought his message of salvation in the Platonic idiom of the day. He appears in the Magical Papyri as the 'Ruler of the Universe' (*kosmokrator*) and the 'Ruler of the All' (*pantokrator*), for he is the link between the one transcendent God, who dwells in the realms of eternal silence, and Man in his fallen state. Borrowing attributes and combining rôles from both theologies – the Egyptian and the Greek – Hermes Trismegistus is the bestower of mystical knowledge and the companion of the soul (the *psychopompos*) in its terrible journey through the labyrinth of the planetary spheres to the safety of the realm of the fixed stars; in other words Hermes is the saviour under whose guidance man exchanges becoming for being, the world of change and corruption for the eternal peace which accompanies the return of the soul to its divine source.

In his capacity as a *logos*, that is as a saviour and a mediator between God and man, Hermes Trismegistus was not unique in a world which saw the rise of Christianity and, equally, the transformation of several ethnic cults into ecumenical revelatory religions. Isis – another Egyptian goddess closely associated with the wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus – is at the same time the dispenser of salvation in her own right and, for the

adept of her mysteries, something more. In the words of a second-century AD initiate, Isis is no less than 'the uniform face of all gods and goddesses (...) whose unique divinity is venerated by the entire world under many forms, with various rites, by manifold names' (Apul. *Met.* XI.5). The Phrygian Great Mother Cybele and the originally Persian Mithras are another two divinities who not only successfully made the transition from the local to the universal but, transcending their specific divine identities, were converted into abstract concepts which functioned within the framework of a philosophical system. In their new roles the deities of a cosmopolitan empire led their faithful by convergent paths to the one unknown God who, according to the new theological idiom, transcended essence and intellection, that is He was beyond both being and understanding, and therefore needed mediators and interpreters.

The unknown god

The nature and identity of this One God increasingly intrigues and preoccupies the average man who now comes to the oracles not only to enquire about his own terrestrial fortunes but also to seek 'the unknown god'. In tune with the negative theology propagated in the early centuries of our era by the spokesmen of a renewed Platonism, Apollo at Claros will answer the question 'who is the supreme god?' with the following statement:

Alas, you have not come to enquire about small matters.
You want to know who is the king of Heaven
Whom even I do not know, yet whom I revere according to tradition (Th. Tub. 12).

And, when pushed too hard by another enquirer, who puts to him the irreverent question 'are *you*, or another God?', Apollo will answer:

Born of Himself, untaught, motherless, immovable.
Not contained in a name, many-named, dwelling in fire,
This is God. We angels are but a part of God. (Th. Tub. 13).

These Apollinian statements, which are typical of a new genre of oracular literature systematizing both theology and worship, are of the utmost interest to us, for, even if not originally sought by the man in the street, their authors made sure that they were broadcast all over the empire (Athanassiadi 1992).

The cosmic pyramid and its ingredients

The mediating role of all sometime ethnic gods, including the god of the Jews, in a

world in which monotheism was becoming the politically correct religious form, was proclaimed by philosopher, prophet and magician alike, while the convergent routes through which these gods led the soul to its salvation confirmed the unity of the universe, since these individual roads corresponded to the ontological chains which held the world together. Suspended from a point at the top of the cosmic pyramid, a point which represented the one and only source of all being, these chains proceeded according to a strict hierarchical order, through the divine, the demonic, the animal and the vegetable, to the very depths of the mineral kingdom.

The cosmic pyramid, the secrets of whose articulation obeyed the laws of universal sympathy, was the gift of the Babylonians to the Hellenistic world; but it was through the ministrations of the Stoic philosopher and of his more familiar counterpart, the magician, that Chaldaean astrology invaded the Hellenistic world at both the learned and the popular level, and was eventually used to accommodate in its various sections the multitude of gods and religious customs of all the nations that had come under the rule of Rome. An illustration of how this worked in practical terms is provided by the pious routine of Proclus, head of the Athenian Academy for the best part of the fifth century. As his biographer records:

> *Every month he celebrated the rites of the Great Mother of which the Romans, and indeed the Phrygians before them, were devotees. He was more careful in observing the unlucky days of the Egyptians than they were themselves, and maintained a personal fast on certain days as a result of divine revelation. (...) He observed according to their proper ancestral rites the significant feasts of every nation (...) with supplicatory vigils, chants and the like, as shown by his collection of hymns, which does not only contain songs of praise to gods honoured by the Greeks, but also celebrates Marnas of Gaza, Asclepius Leontuchos of Ascalon, and Theandrites, a god much honoured among the Arabs, as well as Isis, who is still honoured at Philae, and in a word all the rest. For one maxim that this most god-fearing man had always at hand and never stopped repeating was that the philosopher should not serve the religion of one city nor the ancestral rites of one group only, but be the hierophant of the entire world – κοινῆ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἱεροφάντης.* (Marinus *V.Pr.* 19).

It is the apotheosis of globalization!

For reasons of practical convenience I have so far untied several of the threads which,

when interwoven, make up the fabric of late antique spirituality, what I call the theological *koine* of late antiquity. In the interest of clarity I have thus presented as separate items the eastern notion of divine revelation and the Hellenistic belief in a god-logos or divine mediator who initiates into the mysteries and saves in this life and in the next. Its correlative in the cosmic pyramid, where being proceeds by emanation from a transcendent source at its apex rather than coming into existence through an act of creation, as is the case in the Judeo-Christian thought-world, is the unknown and unknowable God; this supreme being, who is beyond all understanding, can only be revered in silence, an attitude which is at the root of the so-called 'negative' or 'apophatic' theology of late antiquity. Having referred to the laws of sympathy which hold the world together, I have attempted to show how, through their integration into the cosmic or theological pyramid of universal sympathy, the gods and goddesses of the ethnic pantheons of the Roman Commonwealth, together with their ritual traditions and national mythologies, acquired specific roles in the all-inclusive spiritual structure that the spokesmen of a revived Platonism were busy systematizing – an immense task which was begun in the 2nd century AD and did not come to completion until well into the 6th. The paradox of this theological structure which accommodates the many and the one is explained by the quintessentially anti-ritualistic philosopher of Late Antiquity, Plotinus (205-270), in a work that he addressed to the Gnostics:

> *One should praise the intelligible gods and, above all, that great king who displays his greatness in the very multitude of the gods. Not contracting the divine into one, but recognizing it in that multiplicity in which God has manifested Himself, this is what it means to know the power of God, who, while remaining such as He is, creates many gods, all depending on Him, existing through Him and by Him* (*Enn.* II.9.9.35-40).

Plotinus' contemporaries would have had no great difficulty in converting his abstraction into a familiar image, as we shall now see.

From heaven to earth

The century preceding the one in which Plotinus lived and died coincides with the apogee of the political construction known as the Roman Empire. Unchallenged ruler of an *oecoumene* in which it had succeeded in keeping peace for well over a century – the famous *Pax Romana* – the Roman State of the Antonine era was the terrestrial image of the divine pyramid. This analogy, between the cosmic and theological pyramid on the

one hand and the political reality and ideology of the Roman empire on the other, soon became a topos: just as the diverse nations of the world, each under the direction of its own local governor, came together in a harmonious whole under the benign rule of the Roman Emperor, likewise the many national gods administered their own provinces, while peacefully reporting to the one and only God on whom they literally depended. The man who exploited this theme to the full was himself an emperor and by the same token the pontifex maximus of the Roman world. I am referring to the emperor Julian, a copious writer and a superb propagandist, active in the 360s. From his position as secular and spiritual leader of the civilized world, Julian launched his theory of the 'ethnic' or national gods, among whom he included Jehovah; the Christians, whom he called 'Galileans' to deny them any claim to universality, had no place in his scheme, as they lacked a national god. A band of outlaws on earth, they had no place anywhere in the cosmic order. The universal religion of the universal state, as Julian preached it, was Hellenism.

In the Alice in Wonderland world of Late Antiquity, the term Hellenism had undergone, under the impact of Christian polemic, yet another drastic metamorphosis: its prevailing character was no longer linguistic or even social, but purely religious, though the connotation attached to it was pejorative: for the Christian Apologists and Church Fathers who gave currency to the word, Hellenism meant idolatrous polytheism – the worship of idols or of many false gods and demons instead of the one true God. Turning it on its head, the brilliant propagandist Julian used the term *Hellenismos* to include all the theoretical and practical achievements of Neoplatonic philosophy to his day, an important aspect of which was the sanction, through the channel of allegoric interpretation, of all known ethnic gods and cultic traditions.

But if at some point in the mid-fourth century Hellenism could be successfully presented as a theological *koine*, this is only because by that time it lacked none of the accoutrements of a spiritual path, as understood by the men and women of late antiquity, the most important feature of which was a set of divine scriptures. Thanks to the efforts of the great systematizer Iamblichus, Hellenism had been endowed as from the late third century with its own Bible, a holy book of divinely revealed wisdom – the so-called Chaldaean Oracles to which we have already referred in connection with sacred languages. Obeying the rules of reverse Orientalism (a typical product of which is, as we have seen, the Hermetic revelation), in the 2nd century AD the Chaldaean gods spoke – of course in Greek – to a man who seems to have been a priest of Bel at Apamea in Syria.

Julian the Theurgist – for that was his name – received over a period of time a global revelation which included a cosmological and soteriological system as well as a set of moral and ritual rules and practical instructions. This prefiguration of the Kuran, which ended up becoming the Scriptures of Hellenism, was given in Homeric hexameters, providing the Neoplatonists with ideal ground for their exegetical feats (Athanassiadi 1999b).

The moment has come for us to ask to what extent the theological synthesis put forward by Julian as the official religion of the empire – indeed as the alternative to Constantinian Christianity – was in demand. In other words how strong were its popular roots? Evidence from the region that John Dillon has called 'The Platonic Underworld' suggests that Hellenism was not a theological structure concocted in the philosopher's laboratory, but a real *koine*, alive and used at various social and intellectual levels from southern Arabia to the Black Sea coast and from Carthage to Harran. The Gnostic texts, the Hermetic hymns, the Magical Papyri and a steadily growing body of theological oracles and dedicatory inscriptions from all over the late Roman Commonwealth testify to the yearning of men to reach God through the channels established by the new global spirituality (Athanassiadi and Frede (eds) 1999). At the same time the art of the pantomime as well as the mosaics, frescoes, sculptures, silver and embroideries that adorned men's houses provide additional evidence of how widely accepted had become the allegorical interpretation of ethnic mythologies as propagated by the Neoplatonist. Reviewing the visual language of late antiquity one is forced to come to the conclusion that, under the umbrella theology of Hellenism (or rather in accordance with it), a new aesthetic *koine* had sprung up, which the art historian in collaboration with the historian of religion is only now beginning to decipher.

Ut scriptura pictura

One of the major difficulties in trying to understand another period or country results from importing, usually unawares, our own aesthetic and ideological preconceptions. In the case of late antiquity the anachronistic angle from which we view its art and literature is partly excusable, for it was in the vast and pluralist Roman Empire that the divide between a sacred and a profane output was first introduced and actively propagated by an increasingly dynamic group of people – the Christians. Their practice, and the mentality which had engendered it, gradually contaminated those who had been brought up in a tradition which did not divide the creations of the human intellect into a holy and an

Fig. 1. Silver plate with Cybele, Attis and symbols of cyclical time and of eternity (sun and moon, the four seasons, the zodiac, Aeon etc.). Late 4th century AD. Galleria Brera, Milan.

unholy category. Thus many of those who did not belong to the Christian Church began, through the action of osmosis, to draw a demarcation line between the religious and the secular in a conceptual world which had so far formed a unity (Athanassiadi 2002). Their re-reading of the ancient myths in the light of a spiritual teaching is basically responsible for the formation of an art whose function was to evoke and spread by visual means the theology developed by the adepts of a renewed Platonism. Running parallel to the growing popularity of a new literary genre which narrated the lives and miracles of Pythagoras and of Pythagorean saints,[6] the allegorical interpretation of the charter myths

[6] The most important specimens of this literature are Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana, which significantly enough was commissioned by the empress Julia Domna, the Life of Pythagoras by Plotinus'

Fig. 2. Silver plate with scenes from the childhood of Achilles. 4th century AD. Roman Museum, Augst, Switzerland.

of Hellenism was expressed in a variety of media, such as sculptures of all sizes and materials, salvers, plates and other domestic utensils, textiles, wall paintings and, most importantly, mosaics (Figs 1-7). These often extremely intricate compositions had their more ephemeral analogues in the human ensembles created in the theatre by the producers of pantomimes for a spectacle-crazed public.

In a work which praises the art of the pantomime, Lucian gives information on the regional distribution of the thematology of this vastly popular form of entertainment (*On Dance, passim*). Primarily religious and emphatically didactic, the myths and allegories

pupil Porphyry, and Iamblichus' On the Pythagorean Life, a work which presents Pythagoras as the paradigmatic saint and puts forward the rules of the holy life as an imitatio Pythagorae.

that he mentions complement the testimony of the archaeological data, leading to the conclusion that, starting in the second century and continuing until well into the fifth, a real war of images opposed the Hellenic to the Christian theology. Dionysos as the holy infant (Fig. 5), the Creation of Man as a unity of body, soul and mind through the combined efforts of Prometheus, Hermes and Athena (Fig. 6), the beauty, goodness and eternity of the universe and the triumph of order over chaos (represented, by a reversal of the traditional data of the myth, as the victory of Cassiope over the Nereids) are some of the themes which answer not only the apocalyptic visions of Christians and Gnostics about the imminent end of the world, but also their versions of the cosmogony and the

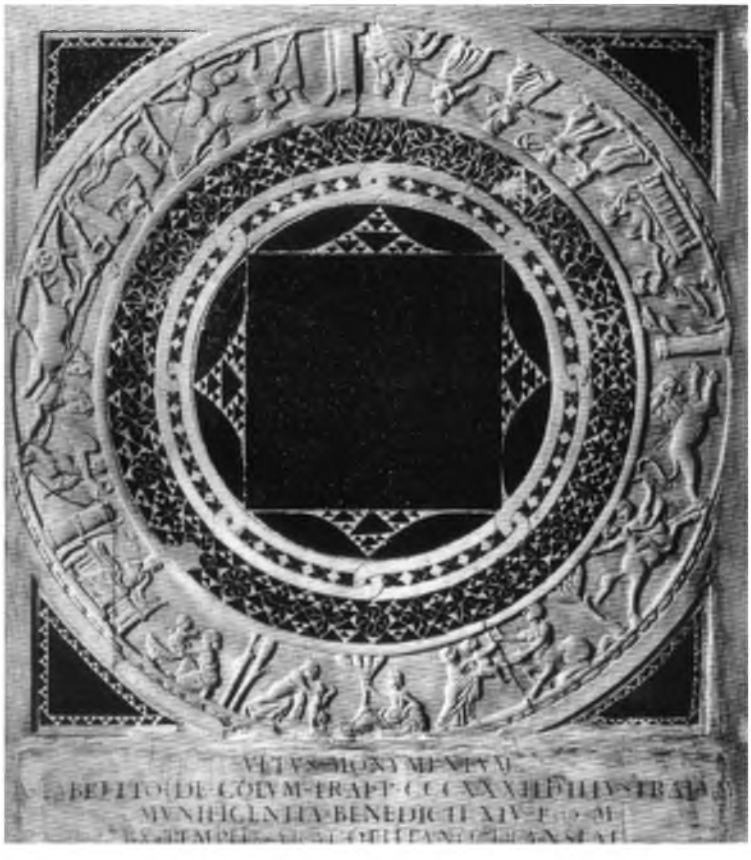

Fig. 3. Marble and mosaic disc with scenes from the life of Achilles. From Egypt, 4th century AD. Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome.

anthropogony (Quet 1999, 327; Quet 2000, 195-7). Indeed, as we advance into the Middle Ages, we find palpable evidence of the battles engaged between the two thought-worlds: the Christian victory is proclaimed by the obliteration of pagan scenes and their substitution by images and symbols which celebrate the coming of the Christian god (Athanassiadi 1999a, 343-7).

Fig. 4. Bronze figure of Odysseus resisting the Sirens. 4th century AD. Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia.

Back in the third and the fourth centuries however whole buildings and even complexes displayed philosophical (or rather theological) programmes, conceived and executed for pedagogic purposes or simply as an assertion of the pious convictions of their owner. The 'House of Sopatros' (also known as the 'School of Iamblichus') at Apamea thus exhibits a sequence of allegorical mosaics with mythological scenes, which have one aim only: to underline the role of philosophy as a way of salvation and not as a cultural pastime (Balty 1995, 265-305). Likewise at Paphos in Cyprus, the splendid mosaics discovered not long ago proclaim the universality of Dionysos as redeemer of humanity and the eternal rule of order and beauty in an undying world (Daszewski 1985).

To illustrate the ubiquity of the new theological idiom as transmitted by the vehicle of art, I will refer to two roughly contemporary compositions, both coming from Syria and dealing with the extremely common theme of the creation of man or anthropogony.[7] The first, from a house in Shahba-Philippopolis, commonly designated as 'the Aion Mosaic', is a work of great complexity. Dated to the mid-third century, and usually associated with the millennium of Rome and the reign of Philip the Arab (who may even be

[7] For a full list of works of art representing Prometheus as the creator of Man, J.R. Gisler, s.v. 'Prometheus', *LIMC* VII.1 (1994), 543-7 with relevant plates in *LIMC* VII.2.

recognizable in the features of Aion), this vast composition can be seen as a hymn to the generosity of the earth and at the same time as a statement of the eternity of the universe. The Platonic dichotomy between being and becoming is dramatically conveyed by the figures of Aion and Prometheus seated at opposite ends of the picture, the former holding the wheel as a symbol of never-ending cyclical time, the latter fashioning the perishable body of the first man, the *Protoplastos* (Fig. 6). A superb specimen of the aesthetic *koine* of late antiquity, the synthesis of Shahba has its corollary in a slightly earlier mosaic, executed in or near Edessa (Fig. 7). It too narrates the story of the creation of man by the Titan Prometheus, but, whereas the iconographical details seem to reproduce images from the travelling pantomimes seen by Lucian (*Dance* 36-38) and Porphyry (*On the animation of Embryons* XI.1, p. 48), thus revealing the universality of a visual (and, by implication, a theological) culture, the style of the mosaic with its fully frontal, juxtaposed figures, duly identified by inscriptions in Syriac, is decidedly Oriental. The theological *koine* of Hellenism is here expressed in a vernacular artistic idiom.[8]

Fig. 5. Mosaic with Dionysos the Holy Infant. From the House of Aeon, Nea Paphos, Cyprus.

Fig. 6. The 'Aeon' Mosaic. From Philippopolis (Shahba), Syria. Archaeological Museum, Damascus.

The Promethean anthropogony from eastern Syria (Fig. 7) allows us a glimpse into an art that was to blossom fully under the inspiration of another world religion, which was additionally a great patron of local cultures. As the examples of late antique Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopean art and literature show, Christianity was a tremendous source of inspiration for those vernacular idioms of the Roman empire which had not yet been entirely swallowed up by the metropolitan culture.[9] What was to happen later to those

[8] For a full stylistic analysis of the newly discovered Syriac mosaic and a detailed study of its two-levelled relationship with the local and the universal in the empire, see the combined study of J. Balty and F. Briquel Chatonnet (2000).

[9] Resisting globalization was not only an impossible task, but it would appear an unimaginable one. Thus in his Panathenaic Oration, which treats Athens as the source and symbolic locus of the global culture of the empire, Aelius Aristides praises the Athenians for the gift of their language to the world ('δι' ὑμῶν ὁμόφωνος πᾶσα γέγονεν ἡ οἰκουμένη, 226), while underlining the shame felt by those who still in the mid-second century AD speak local languages rather than the Greek *koine*, on which the edifice of paideia rests: οἳ τὰς μὲν πατρίους φωνὰς ἐκλελοίπασι καὶ καταισχυνθεῖεν ἄν καὶ ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς διαλεχθῆναι τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρόντων μαρτύρων· πάντες δὲ ἐπὶ τήνδε ἐληλύθασιν ὥσπερ ὅρον τινὰ παιδείας. (227).

ethnic Christianities which insisted on expressing themselves in regional style is well known: they were marginalized, condemned as heretical and eventually excised from the body of the Church and the Empire. In this connection post-Constantinian Christianity did nothing more than follow the example set by Hellenism, which, in its sweeping progress towards unity and universality, had delivered the ethnic minorities of the Greater Mediterranean from their linguistic, cultural and religious parochialism and imposed its own *koine*. If, however, this aspect of Hellenism's globalizing effect is far from attractive, there is another side to our story, and one which has not yet received enough attention: by integrating into one pyramidal structure all local pieties through the complementary processes of syncretism and hierarchization, Hellenism did pave the way for the reception of the hardest of all monotheisms – Islam.

Fig. 7. The 'Prometheus' Mosaic. From the area of Edessa, Syria. Private collection.

ABBREVIATIONS

LIMC	Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia)

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IV

THE GODS ARE GOD

POLYTHEISTIC CULT AND MONOTHEISTIC THEOLOGY IN THE WORLD OF LATE ANTIQUITY

Θεὸς οὖν εἷς καὶ θεοὶ πολλοὶ
There is then one god and many gods
Proclus Theol. Plat. *3.14.4*

I. Definitions and misconceptions

God or gods? Monotheism or polytheism? Belief in one God or in many? This is, I believe, a false antithesis, propounded for the first time in such uncompromising terms by the Jews in a world which knew monotheism *and* polytheism as parallel, contemporaneous, perfectly compatible expressions of the religious experience.[1] As it happened, the disjunctive 'either/or' did not at first trouble those living around the elect: Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and many others continued on their way without paying any attention to the 'either/or' proposition put forward by the People of the Book. At some point, however, the slogan was taken up with uncommon force by the Christian Apologist: the strident cries of men like Justin the Martyr and Clement of Alexandria broke through and rose above the polyphony of the philosophical discourse of their era. And with the secular triumph of Christianity the rhetoric of the Apologists was frozen into a formula which has never been challenged since – "from polytheism to monotheism". Heresiologists and Fathers of the Church never tired of brandishing their evolutionary view of history: "from paganism to Christianity", "from the darkness of error to the light of truth".

Going hand-in-hand with belief in historical progress, these expressions have landscaped the intellectual horizon of the Western Man and shaped his attitude to his own past. To our mind, monotheism is something good and progressive, such an assessment does not require a moment's thought. Polytheism, on the other hand, is not exactly bad, but it is not serious, it implies a superstitious attitude to the divine, an attitude which suits the unsophisticated. Naïve, backward and primitive people believe in many gods. Fortunately though, this is something that happens elsewhere: in the past, on the fringes of the third world or, insofar as it is in our midst, among the uneducated masses who form a subject of study for the sociologist. Such is the patronising stance that we instinctively assume whenever the words "polytheism / polytheist" occur.

But what about those kindred spirits who lived in the era of ignorance — the *jahiliyya* (to use the standard Arabic term to designate pre-Islamic societies)? What about Plato, for instance? Our enlightened gaze tends to view him as transcending his own space and time. Plato is in all important respects our contemporary! Read and understood in the light of our own prejudices, the Platonic theology is a monotheistic

system which pays lip-service only to the fallacies of the world around it: gods and demons, together with the myths which lend substance to their existence, belong to the realm of folk-lore or represent mere abstract entities. Texts like Plato's *Laws* X 907b-910e are either ignored or interpreted in the light of our modern prejudices. But Plato, like his spiritual descendants – the philosophers of late antiquity –, knew that the one and the many are not irreconcilable, that so-called monotheism and polytheism are the two complementary aspects of the same thing: the religious phenomenon. Which brings us to the fundamental question: "what is religion?"

As far as etymology is concerned, our sources cannot agree whether the word 'religio' is derived from *relegere* (to collect) or *religare* (to bind),[2] but this is irrelevant to our present concern, which concentrates on the meaning of the term 'religion' today. In the 1964 edition of the Grand Larousse Encyclopédique, I find the following definition under the entry *Religion*: "religion is a set of doctrines and practices in view of Man's communication with God". According to this old-fashioned understanding of the term religion, its two opposite, yet complementary, facets are made up of theology (i.e. a set of doctrines) and theopraxy or cult (that is a set of ritual acts collectively defined as religious practice). Obviously, one can have the one without the other or an admixture of the two in any combination.

II. The spirit and the letter

As a believer, one may be obsessed with the letter rather than the spirit, that is with form and ritual, while remaining, consciously or unconsciously, indifferent to religion as a theoretical structure. Alternatively, one may be a convinced anti-ritualist, an adept of what certain Hermetists call *religio mentis*, equating the religious experience with a spiritual itinerary from which all cultic landmarks are simply absent.[3] The sacrifice (which according to the latest orthodoxy constitutes the central act of ancient religion) thus becomes an abstraction, a purely mental process, the λογικὴ θυσία which Hermes Trismegistus for one urges his followers to offer to the ineffable godhead.[4]

Not only a participant in the drama, but also a critical spectator – that is a scholar – may vacillate between these two extreme attitudes, on the one hand, the attitude of the theologian who is primarily interested in religion as a systematic structure, and, on the other, that of the anthropologist who views religion as a social phenomenon irrespective of its deeper meaning. But, to my mind at least, the historian of religion ought to combine these two fields of research into a happy synthesis.

Having said that, one may add that each period has its own priorities and tastes and indeed its own political correctnesses. And the trends of scholarship, like everything else, vary with the times. Thus modern religious studies focus on one aspect of the subject, namely the exoteric one: cult and ritual seem to be the object of the discipline at present; description and analysis the methodology through which it is served by the gurus of the field. This shift from the inner to the outward, from belief to behaviour, which has turned *Religionsgeschichte* into a largely (perhaps even purely) social science, is epitomised in the axiom "faire c'est croire"[5]. More alarmingly, this development is reflected in the basic definition given by the *Petit Robert* of the year 2000 to the term religion: "ensemble d'actes rituels liés à la conception d'un domaine sacré

distinct du profane, et destiné à mettre l'âme humaine en rapport avec Dieu". Not a single word about belief, even dogma. Going along with this principle, Simon Price unhesitatingly informs us in a recent work about ancient Greek religion that "practice not belief is the key, and to start from questions about faith or personal piety is to impose alien values on ancient Greece".[6]

In our analysis of religion in late antiquity we will refrain from being modern, and will treat as co-extensive categories both the exoteric and the esoteric, belief and ritual, theory and practice, both the goal of the spiritual quest and the various ways through which men strive to attain this goal. And we will attempt not to lose sight of the fact that the various categories of believers who interest us here lived in the same world and were, therefore, subject to the interactive process of *osmosis*. To explain more clearly what I mean, I can do no better than turn to one of the greatest spiritual masters of all time, the Egyptian Plotinus who lived and taught in Rome in the mid-third century of our era. One of his closest associates was the Italian Amelius who sat at Plotinus' feet for twenty-five years and produced an edition of his lectures in one hundred books. As the other favourite pupil of Plotinus, the Phoenician Porphyry, writes in his master's biography:

> When Amelius grew ritualistic and took to going round visiting the temples at the New Moon and the feasts of the gods, and once asked if he could take Plotinus along with him, Plotinus replied, "The gods ought to come to me, not I to them".

And Porphyry concludes:

> What Plotinus meant by this exalted utterance we could not understand and did not dare to ask. (*Vita Plotini* 10. 32-39).

Three Neoplatonist philosophers with three different attitudes to what we might call traditional religion. Amelius is φιλοθύτης, inclined to sacrificing (with all that goes with it), Porphyry oscillates between the spirit and the letter —he is a kind of theoretician of cult[7] and at the same time he can make a comment like the following: "the mind of the sage alone is the temple of God" par excellence in human society (*Ad Marcellam* 11). As for Plotinus, his mind is at all times the dwelling place of the divine — any ritual act seems to him superfluous. And yet, this austere intellectualist for whom religion amounted to nothing less than "a flight of the alone to the Alone", as he often stated,[8] also declared the following

> One should praise the intelligible gods, and above all, that great king who displays his greatness in the very multitude of the gods. Not contracting the divine into one, but recognising it in that multiplicity in which God has manifested Himself, this is what it means to know the power of God who, while remaining such as He is, creates many gods, all depending on Him, existing through Him and by Him (*Enn.* II.9 [33].9. 35–40).

In other words, God is the gods. In order to substantiate this equation, I will concentrate on the period between the 2nd century AD and the 6th, drawing the bulk of my evidence from individual authors who wrote in Greek and Latin. Inscriptional evidence in these languages and the testimony of magical papyri from the same period

will set my picture in a wider perspective. Unfortunately though, given the nature of the sources, vernacular voices from town and countryside will hardly be audible; it has to be assumed however that in the globalised world of the Roman commonwealth a fair amount of osmosis exerted its influence on those who breathed the same air. With these provisos in mind, let us hark back to the beginnings of the era of globalisation which dawned in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean in the wake of Alexander's conquests.

III. Identifications and fusions: the process of theocracy

As a sequel to the successful campaigns of Alexander in the Middle East, from the late fourth century B.C. Greeks poured in large numbers into the conquered lands and settled among people whose infinitely older cultures had always intrigued and fascinated them. In their new homes, to which they obviously travelled together with their gods, the immigrants found other gods, some of whose characteristics suggested qualities of the Olympians. And with the natural human tendency to view the new from the angle of the old and the foreign from the perspective of the familiar, they began to refer to the Egyptian Ammon and to the various Bels of the Semitic world as Zeus. To their eyes Ishtar/Astarte was none other than Aphrodite, Osiris was Dionysus, Ptah Hephaistus and so on.

But as they became better acquainted with their new milieu, and felt more comfortable and more self-confident, people noticed that these equations were rather coarse and superficial. The gods of East and West were meeting and mingling with each other in an act of cross-fertilisation, a creative synthesis from which new identities were springing up without abolishing the old gods altogether. The old national or ethnic gods continued to lead their partial existence within the framework of an increasingly complicated hierarchical whole. Of course, being immortal, the gods of the Greek pantheon could not die; they were however downgraded, eclipsed by their offspring, and they ended up holding lesser positions within the new divine order. For example Zeus Hypsistos (the Greek name for Baalshamin) was infinitely more powerful than Zeus (just as a Hellenistic king was in relation to the parochial kings of old Greece — Thessaly and Macedonia), while being at the same time more aloof and mysterious than the ruler of the Olympus. The same was true of the other hybrid gods of the Hellenistic *oikoumene*: they were universal entities whose jurisdiction extended over the whole of humanity; and they truly bore little resemblance to the cosy, homely gods of the Homeric epic.

IV. The one and the many or the figure of the pyramid

This mixing or fusion of gods (for which the technical term is theocrasy or theosyncrasy) was a circular process, symptomatic of the widening horizons of the Hellenistic Man who gradually came to envisage particular gods as individual manifestations or, even more abstractly, as attributes of an unknown higher power.[9] The mystery cults, the theosophies and the philosophies which mushroomed in the globalised world of the Hellenistic monarchies and even more so in that of the Roman empire had one tenet in common: they held that at the peak of the theological pyramid there was the one and

only God, unknown and unknowable, transcending both being and understanding. Being beyond essence and intellection, this ineffable, transcendent entity was in need of mediators and interpreters. This was the role eventually assigned to the national or ethnic gods of the conquered lands as well as to the various saviours of the mystery cults which were rapidly growing into oecumenical religions of global appeal — Mithraism, the cult of Magna Mater and that of Isis.

Men create their gods in their own image and likeness, and their ideal universe in the image and likeness of the one in which they live. Thus the one absolute monarch –*princeps* or *dominus*– of the Roman Commonwealth suggested the model of the one omnipotent god who could be reached only through intercessors and mediators, while the administrative pattern of the Roman world served as the mould for the new cosmic order. By the second century A.D. – the time of the apogee of the Roman empire as a political entity – the many national or ethnic gods who administered their own provinces, while dutifully reporting to the one and only God on whom they literally depended, were seen as a reflection of the governors and the satraps of the Roman and the Persian Empires, who were respectively subject to the Emperor and the King of Kings, the Shahanshah.[10]

To the minds of those living in the Roman empire, this pyramid of secular power suggested the form of a heavenly pyramid, a hierarchical structure through which the One and the many, polytheism and monotheism, came together in one body as an organic unity. But let us look a little closer at this geometrical figure which allows us to penetrate into the mechanics of a great paradox – the paradox of monotheism, as a habitué of Eranos, Henry Corbin, has called it.[11]

In Platonic metaphysics (which form the backbone of all theological systems in late antiquity), the one and only source of being (the ὄντως ὄν) manifests itself by an act of procession. Running through an infinite series or chains (which can be visualised as forming a conceptual pyramid), Being becomes evident in the form of lesser beings, whose affinity with their source (and therefore their degree of reality) diminishes according to the distance which separates them from it. Proceeding in a strict hierarchical order, through the divine, the demonic, the animal and the vegetable to the very depths of the mineral realm, these ontological chains hold the universe together and are mutually bound by the laws of universal or cosmic sympathy, whose secrets are known to the priest and the magician.

V. Epiphany

The One is an absolute and, therefore, it cannot be apprehended *per se* — that is in its proper hypostasis. But it can manifest itself in the form of a god or a demon, and this manifestation is what our sources call a theophany or divine epiphany[12]. The specific divinity which reveals itself in this way to the priest, the philosopher, the magician or the layman is recognised and described in terms appropriate to the cultural, intellectual and emotional level of the individual viewer.[13] Thus Plotinus in the passage cited above sees in purely abstract terms "the multiplicity of gods in which God manifests Himself" and refuses to worship them along the lines of a given ritual tradition. Even more clearly than in his address to the Gnostics (from which comes the earlier quotation), he analyses the paradox of monotheism in his treatise *On intelligible beauty*:

> Let Him [the supreme God] come, bringing with Him his own universe, all the gods within Him, He who is one and all, and each god is all the gods coming together into one; they are different in their powers, but by that one manifold power they are all one; or rather the one god is all; for He does not fail if all become what He is; they are all together and each one again apart but indivisibly so. (*Enn.* V 8 [31]. 9. 15-20).

It is difficult to find in the whole of ancient philosophical literature a more intellectual conception and formulation of the epiphany of the one in the many, or rather of the infinity of divine entities (that is of polytheism) as the only possible manifestation and expression of the godhead. For the mystic, creation is nothing less than the epiphany of the divine in specific forms. But there are other, less abstract though by no means less subtle ways of apprehending the divine than the knowledgeable contemplation of the cosmos. For example, as we will shortly see, the second-century A.D. African philosopher Apuleius unhesitatingly recognises the goddess Isis in the divine presence who comes to him on the shore of Corinth, and proceeds to take all the necessary steps leading up to his initiation in her cult. Other, less sophisticated believers were happy merely to record their devotion to the divinity of their choice without acknowledging or even realising that his or her station was an intermediary one along the road to the Absolute, coinciding with a specific manifestation of the divine. A mere glance through any of the volumes of the corpora of inscriptions dedicated by their initiates to their various divine saviours individually or collectively will illustrate this point.

What we should retain, however, from this discussion on the cosmic pyramid and its perception by the men and women of late antiquity is that it accommodated, within the framework of a monistic system, the multitude of gods and religious customs of all the nations which had come under the rule of Rome. Without depriving men of the comfort of traditional worship, this all-inclusive spiritual structure enabled them to profess belief in one God.

The nature of this one inaccessible God, who, according to the late antique theological idiom, is beyond essence (ὑπερούσιος – ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας), increasingly preoccupies the average man who now comes to the oracles not only to enquire about his own terrestrial fortunes, but also to seek "the unknown God". In the second century A.D., a certain Theophilus arrived at the oracle of Apollo at Claros in Asia Minor and asked the god point blank: "are *you* or another God?" To this indiscreet question Apollo replied with unexpected candour:

> Born of Himself, untaught, motherless, immovable
> Not contained in a name, many-named, dwelling in fire,
> This is God. We, angels, are but a small part of God.[14]

From his age-old seat, Apollo was proclaiming the new theology, as symbolised in the figure of the pyramid, acknowledging his own place as a mediator between the first cause and man. Encouraged by this confession, the same or another enquirer ventured to ask the ultimate question: "who *is* the supreme God?". To this Apollo replied in tune with the tenets of the negative theology of the day:

> Alas, you have not come to enquire about small matters.
> You want to know who is the king of heaven
> Whom even I do not know, though I worship him according to tradition![15]

VI. Polyonymy

What this new category of oracles, which A.D. Nock has styled "theological"[16], demonstrates is that, while professing belief in the one ultimate source of all being, people continued to worship Apollo in his capacity as a prophet of metaphysical truth. To corroborate this statement, let us take a few examples from the area of the spiritual underworld, the realm of magic, a discipline which was generally subject to persecution and whose adepts therefore exercised their skill mostly underground. Invoking Apollo, the magician utters the following:

> King Apollo, come together with Paean, pronounce an oracle in answer to my questions, lord. Oh master, leave Mount Parnassus (...) First angel of God, of great Zeus, of Iao. And you Michael ruler of the universe, and you Gabriel leader of angels (πρωτάγγελε), I call on you, descend from Olympus.[17]

This is the milieu of syncretism in which the inhabitants of the empire lived and died. In another invocation, preserved on a different papyrus from the same random Collection, Apollo of Claros is addressed as πολυώνυμος (*PGM* II. 109) – the one with many names – a crucial epithet of the godhead. Indeed polyonymy, whether applied to the one transcendent God or to His various hypostases along the pyramid, is the very key which unlocks the secrets of a world whose conciliatory spirit allowed a multitude of gods and cults to coexist peacefully as complementary rather than alternative paths towards metaphysical illumination.

At the root of this indiscriminate, eminently liberal attitude, which draws on the entire breadth of the theological tradition of the Roman *oikoumene*, is to be found the consciousness that all the known gods, demons and angels fulfil the same intercessory function between the two ends of the ontological chain —Man and God—, and are therefore interchangeable. They are the messengers (literally the ἄγγελοι) of the One and, as such, they inform Man about his spiritual potential and initiate him onto the path of knowledge and salvation. Perhaps the most emphatic assertion of this principle is to be found in a literary work of the 2nd century A.D., where it takes the form of a prayer to Isis. Using a striking metaphor, Apuleius, the creator of Lucius, transforms his spiritually indifferent protagonist into an ass, who achieves metaphysical awareness only after a series of increasingly degrading experiences. The tribulations of Lucius in his ass's shape come to an end in Corinth. Condemned to have public intercourse with a murderess, he escapes from the amphitheatre to arrive, after a long and dangerous flight, at a deserted beach where he falls asleep. But let us hear Lucius himself describing the gradual revelation with which the goddess graced him

> At about the first watch of night I awoke in sudden fright and saw, just emerging from the waves of the sea, the full orb of the moon gleaming with extraordinary brilliance. In the embrace of the silent secrets of the dark night, I realised that the supreme goddess now exercised the fullness of her power. (...) Shaking off at once my torpid slumber, I arose with alacrity. And, in my desire to purify myself, I immediately went to bathe in the sea, plunging my head under the waves seven times, since the divine Pythagoras had declared that number to be especially appropriate to religious rites. And, with my face covered in tears, I prayed to the mighty goddess.

> "Queen of heaven, whether you are bountiful Ceres, the primal mother of crops, … or Celestial Venus … or Phoebus' sister… or the terrible Proserpina – by whatever name, with whatever rite, in whatever image it is meet to invoke you, lend me your assistance, restore me to the Lucius that I once was or at least, if I do not deserve to live, let me die".[18]

Exhausted, Lucius the ass falls asleep once more, but his slumber is interrupted by the vision of the goddess herself who now emerges from the midst of the sea and stands before him in all her glory. Overwhelming Lucius' senses, the goddess reveals to her suppliant the ultimate theological secret, that she is "the uniform face of all gods and goddesses" – *Deorum dearumque facies uniformis*:

> With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld. My divinity is one (*numen unicum*), worshipped by the entire world under different forms, with various rites, by manifold names.

And after the enumeration of some of her most common names, such as Magna Mater and Minerva, Ceres and Hecate, Juno and Bellona, the goddess concludes by revealing her true name:

> But the Egyptians, who are strong in ancient lore, worship me with the rites which are truly mine, and call me by my real name, Queen Isis. I have come to you, Lucius, in pity at your misfortunes; I have come in sympathy and good will! (…) By my providence your day of salvation is dawning. (*Met.* XI. 5)

VII. Inclusive monotheism: pluralism and pax deorum

The principle enunciated by Isis in her revelation to Lucius is that of polyonymy — God is one but has many names. A popular Orphic slogan, which is to be found in the works of the Emperor Julian (*Or.* XI. 136a) and of Macrobius (*Sat.* I. 18. 18) among others, proclaims "One Zeus, one Hades, one Helios, that is Sarapis" .

And Apuleius' contemporary, the philosopher Celsus, in his polemic against the Christians (whom he accuses of compromising belief in the one God by adoring Christ), declares "it makes no difference, whether we call Zeus the Most High or Zeus or Adonai or Sabaoth or Amoun like the Egyptians, or Papaeus like the Scythians" (*Contra Celsum* V. 41). A specific epiphany or manifestation of the *numen unicum*, Isis offers one of many paths to the final destination which coincides with the mystical union with the One. For, as a Roman senator, Symmachus, put it to the Emperor Valentinian II in the late fourth century (*Relatio* III 10), "you cannot obtain access to so great a mystery by one road alone" — *uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum* — a formula which encapsulates the spirit of pluralism at the hour of its gravest peril. To illustrate this saying, let us turn to two contemporaries of Symmachus, the Emperor Julian and Symmachus' close friend, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, and look at the use they make of the convergent roads leading up to the *grande secretum.*

The case of the Emperor Julian

From his position as secular and spiritual leader of the oikoumene —at once a Roman emperor and a pontifex maximus— Julian preached to the world the theology of the *logos* in two dogmatic treatises: the *Hymn to King Helios* and the *Hymn to the Mother of the gods*. Both these treatises presuppose a tripartite division of reality into a transcendent world, inaccessible to our understanding, the sensible world of our everyday experience, and finally an intermediary sphere linking the two. This trinitarian systematisation of reality into an intelligible, an intellectual and a sensible or visible world (κόσμος νοητός, νοερὸς and αἰσθητός/ὁρατός), which Julian inherited from the Syrian philosopher Iamblichus, is crucial to our understanding of the workings of late antique soteriology. Attis and Helios-Mithra, the two gods chosen by the imperial theologian, are both intellectual gods, that is exegetes of reality, teachers and leaders of the soul in her journey towards the ultimate goal. In the case of Apuleius, this function was carried out by Isis. But Dionysus, Adonis or Hermes Trismegistus (to mention only a few of the links between, on the one hand, the here and now and, on the other, the beyond) could, separately or simultaneously, serve as spiritual guides to the exploration of the metaphysical world. So could the various philosophies practised by their adepts, as Julian explained in two speeches addressed to the Cynics of his day: identifying Cynicism as a way to salvation, he presented it as no less effective a road to the beyond than Pythagoreanism, Platonism or Mithraism.

Finally, in his polemical work against the Christians, the emperor expounded a philosophy of history firmly based on the theory of the ethnic or national gods, among whom he included Jehovah. As an emanation of the first cause —a mere θεὸς-λόγος— each one of the ethnic gods is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the race under his jurisdiction, whose culture is but the historical expression of his own character. Thus the nations under the protection of Ares are predominantly warlike, those under Athene are especially wise, whereas those under Hermes are shrewd and enterprising, to mention only a few examples. The Christians, whom Julian called "Galileans" from the name of a backward region in Palestine to deny them any claim to universality, had no place in his scheme, as they lacked a national god. They were mere apostates from Judaism. A band of outlaws on earth, they had no place anywhere in the cosmic order.

Vettius Agorius Praetextatus

Praetextatus was proconsul of Achaia under Julian, Prefect of Rome in 367-8 and praetorian prefect for the East in 384, the year of his death. An initiate to the cults of Magna Mater and of Mithra, an Eleusinian hierophant and a priest of Vesta and of Sol (*CIL* VI (1) 1779), to mention just a few of his allegiances, Praetextatus was immortalised by Macrobius, some fifty years after his death, as the most articulate spokesman of the theology of the pyramid and as a symbol of spiritual liberalism.[19] Less alert than Julian to the seriousness of the "either/or" enjoinment of the Christians, Praetextatus – an initiate into many cults and a priest of many deities- is reported as having said to Pope Damasus, "Make me bishop of Rome, and I will immediately convert to Christianity".[20] This famous joke is, to my mind at least, less indicative of Praetextatus'

sense of humour than of his curiosity and oecumenical leanings. Such attitudes find their place within a long tradition of tolerant incomprehension on the part of the pagan intelligentsia.

Under the impact of their own way of thinking, earlier statesmen and philosophers, most notably Hadrian and Alexander Severus, Numenius and Amelius, could see Christianity as yet another cult in the empire, one more *externa superstitio* in need of the *interpretatio romana*; such men (who were born and raised within a climate of inclusive monotheism) were far from realising that the great difference between Judaism (whose offshoot it was) and Christianity was that, in addition to its "either/or" postulate vis-à-vis the pluralistic religious tradition of the Roman world, Christianity held a missionary stance from day one. In other words, to the exclusivist attitude, which it had inherited from Hebrew monotheism, it added the spirit of proselytism. Not only did it claim a monopoly of the truth, but it prescribed the proselytising of the religiously inferior "nations" as a duty of the believer.

VIII. The theological koine *of inclusive monotheism*

Enough has been said to indicate that the world in which Christianity arose was global not only in political but also, and especially, in cultural terms. Its lingua franca was a standardised form of Greek based on the Attic dialect, the so-called *koine*, an adjective which denotes a "common" language. To this linguistic *koine* there corresponds a theological *koine* whose range covered the metaphysical horizons of the Hellenistic world from magic to philosophy. Symbolised in the figure of the pyramid, this spiritual *koine* harmonised the one and the many, while stressing the inaccessibility of the apex and, consequently, the crucial importance of the middle zone between the sensible and the intelligible universe, the intelligent universe in Neoplatonic terms (the νοερὸς κόσμος of the Emperor Julian), or "imaginal world" (*mundus imaginalis*), as Henry Corbin has named it with reference to the angelic/ divine hierarchies in Islamic mysticism.

So far we have dealt with some of the alternative routes to the one God which the inclusive monotheism of the Greco-Roman *oikoumene* offered to its customers. However cursorily, we have followed routes taken by the men and women of late antiquity towards spiritual illumination – on the one hand, roads paved by a ritual routine and strewn with gods and religious symbols and, on the other, the solitary path of philosophical ascent, often leading to the *via negativa* of the mystic. Let us now concentrate on one specific example, that of a female deity, whose cult combines the two approaches: equally familiar to the philosopher and the magician, Hecate is the mistress of the cosmos both to the theurgist and the magician; the central (in every conceivable sense) deity of the Chaldaean Oracles, and the goddess par excellence of the magical papyri.[21] But why am I bringing in at this stage the Chaldaean Oracles in a discussion on pagan belief and worship? Because to all intents and purposes this book served the Neoplatonists (who are the most articulate defenders of cult in late paganism) as a Bible.

IX. The Chaldaean Oracles

The Chaldaean Oracles are a divine revelation in Homeric hexameters of a cosmological and soteriological system and of a set of moral, ritual and dietary rules and instructions, which was "given" in the second century A.D. to a certain Julian known as the Theurgist. My own research has led me to suspect that this man, who was the son of another Julian surnamed the Chaldaean, may have belonged to a priestly caste attached to the temple of Bel-Hadad in Apamea in Syria. And that the revelation (which he clearly received intermittently over a period of many years) was primarily delivered to him by the oracular god whom he was serving and whom the Oracles identify with the Twice Beyond or transcendent first principle.[22]

Unfortunately the literary corpus of some 350 lines that we possess is highly fragmentary. Moreover, its present form as a Collection goes back to the late 19th century when it was put together according to the ideological criteria of the time. Thus we have absolutely no idea of the way in which the Chaldaean Oracles were originally structured. The only thing we know for certain is that this revelation served the Neoplatonists, at least from Iamblichus (c.245 – c.325) onwards, as a holy book. In this connection, one should stress two interrelated facts: (1) increasingly, in late antiquity truth and science were considered to be the fruit of divine revelation rather than the outcome of rational thinking, and (2) this supernaturally revealed wisdom was treasured in a holy book which, while inaugurating a hermeneutical industry feeding exclusively on this one book, downgraded and eventually evicted from the religious market all other books.

Both these trends are illustrated through the progress of later Platonism. In the curriculum of studies established by Iamblichus, and endorsed by all his successors, the Chaldaean Oracles occupy the apex of the educational pyramid: only the most devoted among the students in philosophy were allowed to take part in the seminar in which the mysteries pertaining to the *Oracles* were unravelled.[23] Correspondingly, a philosopher's highest achievement coincided with the production of a commentary on the *Oracles*. Let us illustrate both these points by the example of Proclus, head (*diadochus*) of the Platonic Academy for most of the fifth century. As a student, Proclus was offered the privilege of an initiation into the mysteries of the Chaldaeans by his master, Syrianus, but was prevented from exercising it because of the latter's untimely death. Yet Proclus rectified the situation by

> carefully studying the voluminous works of Porphyry and Iamblichus on the *Oracles* and on the associated writings of the Chaldaeans [the two Julians who had themselves produced commentaries on the supernatural revelation]. Nurtured on the divine oracles, he rapidly attained the highest peaks of the virtues which are accessible to the human soul — those which the inspired Iamblichus has so sublimely styled the theurgic virtues. And gathering together the exegeses of earlier philosophers with due discrimination, he composed works on subjects of Chaldaean theology, notably his magnum opus commenting on the divinely inspired *Oracles*. This task took him no less than five years. In this connection he had a divinely inspired dream: the great Plutarch appeared to him as he slept, and foretold that he would live for the same number of years as was the number of tetrads in his work on the *Oracles*.[24] And when he counted them, he found that there were seventy. (Marinus, *Proclus* 26. 17–33)

So much for Proclus and his Chaldaean piety. But let us go back to Hecate. In the theological system of the *Chaldaean Oracles* as expounded by the Platonists of late antiquity, Hecate is the soul of the universe, the female principle which manifests itself at all levels of the cosmic hierarchy. In an oracle quoted by Proclus in his Commentary on the Platonic *Timaeus* she declares:

> I, Psyche, dwell below the paternal thoughts
> Ensouling all with my warmth.[25]

As is apparent from this and other fragments of the Chaldaean revelation, Hecate receives from the first transcendent principle —the Father or Paternal Intellect— his thoughts, that is the archetypal forms of all things, and she passes them on to the Second god —the equivalent of the Platonic demiurge— whose function is to create the physical world. As she herself proclaims: "Here are the thoughts of the Father rolled up in my own fire (fr. 38)".

Nurturing and transmuting by her vivifying fire the Ideas of the supreme God, Hecate delivers them to the creator. She is a pregnant bridge, as it were, between the intelligible and the intellectual spheres, a mother goddess, often identified with Life and with Nature (but also with Isis, as we have seen in Lucius' prayer), since her role in creation is such a crucial one. However, Hecate is an ambivalent, ambiguous power functioning as much as a link as a boundary. Like the ancient Roman god Janus, she has two faces, hence her Chaldaean adjectives of "ambifaced" (αμφιπρόσωπος) and "ambiluminous"(αμφιφαής). And as the dividing bond between transcendence and creation, being and becoming, eternity and time, the liminal goddess is aptly likened by the Oracles to a «girdling membrane», whose mission is to guard and preserve the cosmic order (fr. 6). In this connection she is the *kleidouchos*[26] – the key holder – of the universe and guardian of its multiple gates. Chthonic and celestial at the same time, this mistress of the intermediate zone between the sensible and the intelligible worlds is not confined to her own realm: continually on the move, she traverses the ontological spheres at will, controls frontiers, unlocks the secrets of the cosmos and guides towards the paths of knowledge and salvation those who know how to approach her. An invocation to κυρία Ἑκάτη (*PGM* IV. 1431), from the so-called "great Paris magical papyrus" at the Bibliothèque Nationale, reads as follows:

> And hearing your cry the whole of the Cosmos is shaken, the gates of the Underworld and the sacred water of Lethe, primal Chaos and the shining chasm of Tartarus. All the immortals, all mortal men, the starry peaks, the valleys, every tree, the roaring rivers and restless sea, the solitary echo and the daemons throughout the Cosmos – all these tremble, O blessed one, at the sound of your dread voice. Come hither, goddess of night. (*PGM* IV. 2533–2544)

> Come hither, she-wolf, come to me now, goddess of night, chthonic deity, holy one, clad in black, through whom the star-traversing Nature of the Cosmos renews its cycles when you wax mightily. You have established everything in the Cosmos. You engender everything on the earth and from the sea and the birds of every kind which come home to roost, Aphrodite, Mother of all who gave birth to love, lamp-bearer, shining and gleaming Moon. Star-coursing, heavenly one,

> torch-bearer, who breathes fire, four-faced, four-named, lady of the crossroads. Hail O goddess, give ear to your appellations, heavenly one, lady of the harbour, who roams the mountains, goddess of the roadsides, of the Underworld, of the depths, eternal and dark. Attend on my sacrifices, accomplish this task in answer to my prayer and hear me, I beg you, O queen. (*PGM* IV. 2550–2567).

This, we are subsequently told, is a potent spell which can accomplish anything, but it should not be used too often, since Hecate-Selene should not be troubled with unimportant matters.

We have now entered the Platonic Underworld, the realm of the magician. His Hecate, however, does not differ fundamentally from the omnipotent goddess of the Chaldaean revelation (rather as the Christ of the housewife does not differ from the Christ of the mystic). But let us take a closer look at the Hecate of the Neoplatonic philosopher, or rather at his state of mind as he invokes the goddess who oversees all magic practice. Here is Proclus again. According to the testimony of his pupil and successor to Plato's chair, Marinus,

> [Proclus] practised the Chaldaean arts of uniting with and seeking intercession from the divine, together with the use of the sacred and ineffable magic wheels. This knowledge he acquired from Asclepigenia, the daughter of Plutarch, who had also taught him the vocal emissions and all the other Chaldaean practices. She was the sole custodian of the rituals and the entire process of theurgy, which had been transmitted from the great Nestorius and handed down to her from her father. Proclus caused rains to fall by the use of a magic top (iynx) and thereby delivered Attica from a terrible drought. He also laid down talismans against earthquakes (....). And in his fortieth year he had a dream in which he himself uttered the words:
>
> "There where the supra-celestial, immortal light hovers,
> Leaping forth from the primal roar of congregating flame"
> And at the start of his forty-second year he seemed to speak in a loud voice:
> "My soul, exhaling the strength of fire, has reached its destination.
> And unfurling the intellect to the aether in a fiery whirl
> It sets the starry circles roaring for eternity." (*Proclus* 28. 8-33).

As Proclus' biographer tells us, his master had reached the very pinnacle in the hierarchy of Neoplatonic virtues — what the divine Iamblichus had defined as theurgic virtues. The controversial terms 'theurgic' and 'theurgy' have already occurred in our discussion. What is their meaning?

X. Theurgy

A simplistic definition equates theurgy with higher magic, a discipline exploiting the laws of universal sympathy for a good purpose — the performance of a miracle of the type described in the passage just quoted, or even the achievement of the mystic union. The great exponent of theurgy (a word which does not occur in the surviving corpus of Chaldaean Oracles) is Iamblichus who, in his letter to Porphyry, the so-called *De Mysteriis*, defines theurgy (ἡ τῶν θείων ἔργων τέχνη: *De myst.* I. 9 (33, 9–10)) as "the

performance of ritual acts which transcend all intellection, and the utterance of magic sounds and names, which cause the appearance of gods and demons and ultimately bring the purified soul of the officiant to union with the divine" (*De myst.* II. 11 (96, 17–97, 2)).

With Iamblichus we are deep into ritual. Action, as opposed to mere theoretical thinking, is what is needed for the officiant to communicate with the gods. As he puts it: "it is not thinking which unites the theurgists with the gods; for if it were so what would be preventing the theoretical philosophers from reaching the theurgical union?" (*De myst.* II. 11. (96, 13–16)). Iamblichus also wrote a 'Pythagorean Life' (rather than a straightforward biography of Pythagoras, as Porphyry had done before him), in which he presents his hero as a compulsive initiate in all the cults and mysteries of the ancient world (*De vita pyth.* 151). And as the leader of a scholarly community, he led excursions to holy places and performed sacrifices and even miracles as part of his teaching routine.[27] Yet the same man could describe the godhead in the following terms:

> In priority to absolute reality and the universal principles there is a God, one God who takes precedence over the first god and king and remains immovable in the isolation of his oneness. Nothing touches him, intelligible or otherwise. He is the established model of the god who is both father and son to himself and the sole father of the absolute good (*De myst.* VIII. 2 (261, 9–14)).

Only Damascius, the last head of the Academy, will go further than that in expounding an apophatic theology. But let us return to Iamblichus' definition of theurgy.

When the operant calls on God, Iamblichus explains to Porphyry, the God sends forth an excess of energy and illuminates him, without of course descending in any physical sense. The divine power, manifesting itself in the form of light, is perceptible to the theurgist who remains conscious. The prophetic and other miraculous activities, with which this communication with the divine (for which the technical term is *systasis*) endows the theurgist, are but stages on the way to the mystic union, when all alterity, plurality or multiplicity is abolished. Yet such a goal can only be reached by one who has ascended the ladder of virtues, as indeed the *Life of Proclus* exemplifies.

Elaborating on the scale of virtues set up by Porphyry, Iamblichus introduced the following scheme which was accepted by all his followers: 1. Natural virtues (pertaining to the body), 2. Moral virtues, 3. Political virtues (pertaining to the soul and dispensed by education). At this stage in the Neoplatonic progression a dividing line is drawn between the lower virtues and the ones pertaining to the higher hypostasis of man, when the soul looks up to the *nous,* 4. Purificatory virtues (which initiate to the divine world), 5. Contemplative virtues (through which the intellectual gods can be apprehended), 6. Paradigmatic virtues (which allow the conception of the intellegible), 7. Theurgical or hieratical virtues (which bring about the union with the One).[28]

The Platonic educational curriculum of later antiquity was no less than an ascending itinerary from the moral to the spiritual. Starting at the bottom of the ladder of virtues, the student ascended from the practical to the theoretical, and thence to the theurgical, this last stage corresponding to the mystic union. Naturally, in the course of this process, it was always possible to cheat either by acquiring the exoteric skills only or even by bypassing certain stages. Indeed in their discussion on theurgy, Iamblichus

conceded this point to Porphyry (a concession which has given rise to much misunderstanding about his own view of theurgy): it is possible, Iamblichus admitted, to obtain divine messages by manipulating the laws of nature (*De myst.* IV. 10), but then, he warned his correspondent, divination becomes a technique which does not bring happiness.

An excellent example of how this may happen is provided by one of the most gifted students of Iamblichan platonism, the famous Maximus of Ephesus, who acted as spiritual guide of the Emperor Julian. As a young prince, Julian rushed to meet Maximus, having heard the following story from the lips of the sober Eusebius of Myndus who failed to convince him that the salvation of one's soul should be pursued by rational means only:

> Maximus, said Eusebius, is one of the oldest and most learned students, who, on account of his exceptional intelligence and superabundant eloquence, scorned all logical proof in these matters and impetuously resorted to the acts of a madman. Not long since, he invited us to the temple of Hecate and summoned many witnesses of his folly. When we had arrived there and had saluted the goddess, he said: 'Be seated, my well-beloved friends, and observe the future, and whether I differ in any way from common humanity.' When he had spoken, and we had all sat down, he burnt a grain of incense and recited to himself the whole of some hymn or other; then he reached such a state of boastfulness that the statue of the goddess first began to smile, then even seemed to laugh aloud. We were all much terrified by this sight, but he said: 'Let none of you be terrified by these things, for presently even the torches which the goddess holds in her hands shall kindle into flame.' Before he could finish speaking the torches burst into a blaze of light, and we came away for the moment amazed by this histrionic miracle-worker." (Eunapius *V.Phil.* VII. 2. 6–11.)

Maximus came to a bad end during the persecutions against pagan intellectuals unleashed in the 370s by Valens, even though his theurgic expertise had enabled him to foretell both his own and the emperor's fate (if this can be deemed a consolation).

At the opposite extreme to Maximus, who uses his knowledge of the cosmic structures to satisfy his own vanity by attaining worldly power and glory, stands Proclus, who calls on divine assistance only in order to benefit humanity, to whose service he has whole-heartedly dedicated himself. But let us listen once more to his biographer:

> And sometimes the philosopher took part in political debates. He was present at public meetings on city matters, expressed judicious opinions and had meetings with the officials on matters of justice, in which he not only gave advice but also used his philosopher's licence to ensure that everyone obtained what was due to them. He took good care that his students' conduct should conform to the proper standards in public, and taught them a prudent way of life not only by verbal instruction but also through every aspect of his day-to-day existence, so that he became for everyone the exemplar of prudent behaviour.
>
> On political issues he displayed a courage which was worthy of Hercules. He came on the scene at a stormy and tempestuous period, when Typhonian gales were raging against the lawful way of life, and he led a steadfast, unwavering exis-

> tence even in the face of danger. At a critical moment, when faced with monstrous creatures of prey, he left Athens without more ado, entrusting himself to the rotation of the All, and set sail for Asia. (...) He stayed in Lydia for just a year, and then returned to Athens through the providence of the deity who favours wisdom. (Marinus, *Proclus* 15–16).

A truly decent man, who shared his activities between the theoretical and the practical, Proclus was at one and the same time an exponent of the negative theology of a hard monotheism and a convinced ritualist, indeed a meticulous practitioner of all cults known to the Roman oikoumene:

> Every month he celebrated the purificatory rituals of the Great Mother, which had been observed by the Romans and the Phrygians before them. He took more precautions over the unlucky days of the Egyptians than the Egyptians themselves, and in a more personal fashion he fasted on certain days after a divine epiphany. He observed the significant feasts of practically every nation according to the ancestral customs of each (...) with supplicatory vigils, chants and the like, as shown by his collection of hymns, which not only contains songs of praise to gods honoured by the Greeks, but also celebrates Marnas of Gaza, Asclepius Leontuchos of Ascalon, and Theandrites, another god much honoured among the Arabs, as well as Isis, who is still honoured at Philae, and in a word every single deity. For one maxim that this most godfearing man had always at hand and never stopped repeating was that the philosopher should not serve the religion of one city nor the ancestral rites of one group only, but be the hierophant of the entire world (κοινὴ τοῦ ὅλου κόσμου ἱεροφάντης). (Marinus, *Proclus* 19, 7–30).

As well as being the apotheosis of globalisation, Proclus' profession of faith amounts to no less than the apotheosis of monotheism. Proclus knows that what he reveres in the personalities of the different ethnic deities of the Roman Commonwealth is in each case merely an attribute of the ἕν/ὄν (the One and/or Being as the Neoplatonists put it). Its various forms or manifestations, which turn a negative theology into a positive one, correspond to the time and place where they occur and are perceived and worshipped according to the cultural tradition that they embody; and Proclus pays his respects to each one of these traditions.

With reference as much to the theology of Proclus as to the mystical dimension of Islam, Corbin has succinctly analysed the duality negation (expressed as affirmation apophatic theology/ affirmative worship), which makes up "the paradox of monotheism". As he put it towards the end of his life, in a conversation with Philippe Nemo: "La Théophanie est ... essentielle pour qu'il y ait une théologie affirmative possible. C'est précisément pourquoi, si la Divinité est une et unique, les Dieux, c'est-à-dire les Noms divins, les Figures divines, les Figures théophaniques sont multiples. Aucune n'a à remplir les fonctions de la Cause suprême. Confondre l'une de ces Figures nécessaires avec la Divinité une et unique revient à instaurer une idole unique à la place des autres, et le monothéisme périt dans sa victoire".[29]

[1] See E. Hornung, *Les dieux de l'Egypte. L'Un et le Multiple*, tr. P. Couturiau, Paris 1992 (German original 1971).
[2] For the first etymology, cf. Cicero, *De deorum natura* 2. 28. 72; for the second, Servius, *ad Verg. Aen.* VIII. 349 and Augustine, *Retractationes* I. 13.
[3] Cf. [Hermes Trismegistus] I. 31.
[4] [Hermes Trismegistus], I. 31; XIII. 18, 19, 21 ; *Asclepius* 41 Nock.
[5] Cf. J. Scheid, *Quand faire, c'est croire. Les rites sacrificiels des Romains*, Paris 2005.
[6] S.R.F. Price, *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, Cambridge 1999, p. 3.
[7] Cf. his treatise on statues (*De imaginibus*) and that on oracles (*De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*).
[8] *Enn.* I. 6 [1]. 7. 9; cf. VI. 7 [38]. 34. 8; VI. 9 [8]. 11. 51.
[9] See M. Frede, "Monotheism and pagan philosophy in later antiquity", in: *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede, Oxford 1999, p. 41–67, as well as the general introduction to the volume, pp. 1–20.
[10] Cf. Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 43. 18ff and Celsus, *CC* VIII. 35.
[11] H. Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, Paris 1981.
[12] For a typology of divine epiphanies (according to the rank held by each divine category in the hierarchy of supernatural powers), see Iamblichus, *De myst.* II. 4 (75, 11–76, 14).
[13] For a good analysis of this point, see Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, p. 152.
[14] *Theosophia Tubingensis* 13. 14–16 in: *Theosophorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. H. Erbse, Stuttgart–Leipzig 1995, pp. 8–9.
[15] *Theos. Tub.* 12. 1–3.
[16] "Oracles théologiques", in: *Revue des Études Anciennes* 30 (1928), p. 280–290.
[17] *Papyri Graecae Magicae* [*PGM*] I. 295–301 (Preisendanz).
[18] Apuleius, *Met.* XI. 1–2.
[19] See Wolf Liebeschuetz, "The significance of the speech of Praetextatus", in: *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede, Oxford 1999, pp. 185–205.
[20] Jerome, *Lib. contr. Joh. Hierosol.* 8.
[21] Cf. S. I. Johnston, *Hecate Soteira*, Atlanta 1989, a book which explores the various rôles of the goddess in the Chaldaean Oracles and related literature.
[22] For this and for what follows, see P. Athanassiadi, "Apamea and the *Chaldaean Oracles*. A holy city and a holy book", in: *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. A. Smith, Swansea 2005, pp. 117–143; Ead., *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardi. De Numénius à Damascius*, Paris 2006, pp. 38–70 and passim; Ead., "Julian the Theurgist: man or myth?" [XVII in this Variorum volume].
[23] Cf. Marinus, *Proclus* 26 (for Proclus and Domninus); Damascius, *The Philosophical History* fr. 145B Athanassiadi (for Hegias).
[24] Each tetrad contains 16 folio pages.
[25] Chaldaean Oracles fr. 53 Des Places.
[26] For the epithet, see Proclus, *In Tim.* II. 121. 7–8.
[27] Eunapius, *V. Phil.* V. 1–2.
[28] For an exhaustive analysis of the Neoplatonic scale of virtues, see H.-D. Saffrey/A.-Ph. Segonds, Introduction to Marinus, *Proclus ou sur le Bonheur*, Paris 2001, p. LXIX–XCVII.
[29] H. Corbin, *L'Imâm caché*, Paris 2003, pp. 204–205.

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V

APAMEA AND THE CHALDAEAN ORACLES: A HOLY CITY AND A HOLY BOOK

The Neoplatonists were men of their time – inhabitants of a world in which the sacred made its presence felt in ever more concrete forms. Holy places and holy objects (otherwise known as relics) proliferated, and people travelled long distances to visit and venerate them. The concept of the sacred in its geographical and its purely material dimension was admittedly not new to the ancient world. What was new was the emphasis placed on the phenomenon in late antiquity, and also the enlargement of the list of holy objects with items previously considered either a source of pollution (e.g. dead bodies)[1] or irrelevant to any notion of sacrality. To the latter category belongs the Holy Book, whose pre-eminence in the making of late antiquity can hardly be exaggerated. Not unconnected with the invention of the *codex*, the Holy Book emerges at the end of the second century AD as the touchstone which automatically brands all other literature as profane, apocryphal or at best peripheral.[2] How does Hellenism fit into this landscape? Of direct relevance to this question is the book which has been described as 'the Bible of the Neoplatonists', the so-called Chaldaean Oracles. But before seeking to grasp it synchronically by examining its birth and nature, one must go back in time and, by reflecting on the primordial antithesis between the written and the oral, consider the attitude of the Greeks to writing in general and to holy scriptures in particular. In the two methods of human expression, contrasted, yet at the same time ineluctably linked, and in the dialectics of their relationship, the world of scholarship has in recent years found an area of renewed interest which may not be unconnected with the return to the scriptures advocated by the many fundamentalist movements of our day. Indeed by seeking to understand how the idolatry of the written word emerged in the past we are reflecting on issues as much of contemporary as of ancient history.[3]

The oral versus the written word

Under the inspiration of the Muse, the poet *reveals* to mankind the secrets

of heaven. In direct contact with the divine, he is literally the *angelos*, the messenger, of a transcendental truth. Expressed in words, this truth perforce loses a part of its essence, even though the words themselves are 'winged creatures' (ἔπεα πτερόεντα), an intermediary between heaven and earth. The words 'fly' – *verba volant,* but with a positive meaning – being free of all material weight. This is the uncreated word of the Koranic revelation, the Logos as mediator between a transcendent God and Man in his fallen state. The natural condition of the Logos and at the same time its natural means of transmission is orality, a fragile method which leaves it in constant danger of extinction. A more durable method of preserving the prophetic voice exists, however, and this is provided by the technology of writing, though the ambivalence of this blessing was noted early; it was indeed felt that as soon as the supernatural message was fixed in material symbols, the prophetic word lost its vital essence and its power. In the words of Plato, it became 'a dead letter', 'a simulacrum of the living and animated speech' which it purported to reproduce and preserve (*Phaedrus* 276a).

The tension between writing, which preserves the divine message while denaturising and betraying it, and the revealed word which is grafted on to the collective memory, is present in all societies, but the intensity of the conflict varies according to time and place. One must not forget that there is also a tradition which lays emphasis on the primordial sanctity of writing. Invented by a god, Thoth-Hermes, writing has often served the deity as a means of communication with man.[4] The Ten Commandments, the Sibylline tablets and the prophesies preserved in oracular temples are just a few examples. It is only legitimate to conclude, then, that the primacy of writing or of speech depends on the mood of the age.

Luke and Paul (*Acts* 7: 38, *Rom.* 2) refer to the oral instructions –the λόγια ζῶντα – which Moses received on Mount Sinai at the same time as the written law, thus drawing our attention to the duality of the means available to God for communicating his message. But what is relevant in the present context is that it is about this time that the Jews feel the need to commit to writing the oral part of the Torah. Between the second and the seventh century AD the living word of God, which, according to Jewish belief, was transmitted to mankind through a chain of sages of whom Moses represented the first link, was given written form. This massive task (which is at the same time a work of transcription and interpretation) began with the Mishnah and ended with the Babylonian Talmud.[5] That the Mishnah should be codified, and thus attain the status of canonical text, at the end of the second century – the very moment when the canon of the New Testament was born – is not a coincidence; for the need which drove Jews and Christians to close the oral or prophetic cycle and open the

hermeneutic era was equally felt by their pagan contemporaries, so that one may indeed talk in terms of *Zeitgeist*. But before attempting to examine the pagan position, which has been surprisingly little studied and commented on, it is necessary to consider in very general terms three fundamental issues: firstly, the notion of the canon; secondly, the perspective created by the establishment of a canonical text for reviewing the intellectual heritage of the past; and thirdly, the hermeneutic practice in itself.

On the first point, one may remark that from the moment that a body of so-called canonical texts is established, the idea of exclusivity is born, an idea based on the practice of exclusion: all texts dealing with the same material which are outside the fixed limits of the canon are automatically discarded as lacking authority and even authenticity (Bertrand 2002). The term 'apocrypha', which is applied to them, is neither innocent nor neutral; with its literal meaning 'obscure', 'veiled', 'secret', it is a word heavy with sinister connotations, since what is or should be hidden is ripe for persecution.

The internal contrast between canonical and apocryphal has its counterpart in an external antithesis, which brings us to the second issue: the sacred canon floats in the time and space of a secular ocean. An entire past has to be reconsidered: in redefining it a whole tradition, foreign or even hostile to the canon, has to be examined with a view to rejection or acceptance. This tradition, which is by definition profane, continues to evolve as a living entity, to be transformed and redefined according to changing criteria. The canon has to take a position and even to defend itself against this moving force. Thus the canonical book of the Christians had to define itself by reference to the Jewish tradition (as is already implicit in the use of the expression 'New Testament'), and, a fortiori, to the Greek tradition, which had given it not only its language but more importantly a methodology of reading, and which at the same time continued to evolve in important and original ways.

Towards this double heritage, the Jewish and the Greek, the Christians adopted an eminently critical attitude: on the one hand they condemned and rejected, on the other they allegorized and interpreted. These two techniques, which were borrowed from contemporary Platonism,[6] constitute what Guy Stroumsa (1998) calls 'the Christian hermeneutic revolution'. But this Christian putsch did not occur in a vacuum. Taking place as it did in the context of the intellectual history of late antiquity, it unleashed comparable movements in the regions that it invaded. Within the domain of Judaism it provoked the rabbinical reaction against the appropriation of texts that outsiders now grouped under the label of *Old* Testament and interpreted allegorically; while in the domain of Hellenism it precipitated

a development which was already in progress under its own momentum, as the rest of this paper will attempt to show.

Revelation in Greece

Divine revelation was a concept familiar to the Greeks from earliest times. The god appeared and spoke to mortals, but the divine words had to be preserved by memory and not in writing; this was a cardinal principle of Pythagoreanism and of Platonism, and even more of the Eleusinian mysteries. A common phenomenon in Hellenism, the divine appearance or theophany took a variety of forms; one may indeed talk of a plural and perpetual revelation. By contrast Christianity conceived of the *parousia* of the *logos* as a unique event in human history. This primordial antithesis between the temporal and spatial ubiquity of the divine *logos* in Hellenism and the absolute uniqueness of its manifestation in Christianity (namely the incarnation of the Word) lies at the heart of the difference in the role of writing within the two traditions. To the extent that the divine word enunciated by a human mouth, whether prophetic or philosophical, was converted into writing by the Greeks, this writing did not acquire the permanence of a canon. In other words the divine revelation was not codified and integrated into a closed system to be commented on in a systematic manner. [7]

This situation seems to have changed by the mid-third century AD when a new literary form, that of the commentary on a thematic collection of oracles, makes its appearance. The main example is the *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda* of Porphyry, a pot-pourri of heterogeneous material in which the place of honour seems to have been reserved for the largely contemporary oracular wisdom from Didyma, though the Chaldaean Oracles also seem to have played an important role in it.[8] To judge from the surviving fragments (which are the fruit of an arbitrary selection made by Christians for their own purposes), Porphyry's original aim must have been the proclamation of a monotheistic theology and the reform of cult. This work, which served as a model to the Christians of future generations by suggesting to them the ingenious idea of showing through collections of oracles that the pagan gods had predicted the birth of Christ and the triumph of Christianity, is not a *hapax* in third-century theological literature. The Roman Cornelius Labeo seems also to have collected and interpreted the oracles of the other major Apollonian establishment in Asia Minor – Claros. It is conceivable that these two works are instances of a new trend. Elsewhere I have put forward the theory that the production of these exegetic works in the service of the pagan monotheistic cause was instigated, or at least encouraged, by the same priests and prophets who now launched the new paganism by pronouncing their 'theological',

or even 'theurgic', oracles (Athanassiadi 1992a and 1999a, 178–80). And it is not at all improbable that these promoters of the theological *koine* of late antiquity used to invite the eminent scholars of their day to conduct research in their archives, codify their material and at the same time spread the new theology by means of a critical edition of the oracular literature. Unprovable though it may be, this hypothesis would complete the picture of the renewal of divination, institutional as much as private, with which we are confronted in the second and third centuries.[9]

The Chaldaean Oracles

Leaving aside the oracles requested from and delivered by a specific god in a traditional institution, we may turn to the Chaldaean Oracles, those utterances without a known place of origin, in which, as has already been mentioned, Porphyry was especially interested.[10] Who produced them, who recorded them, who made them into a canon, when, where and how? To all these questions the answers must be uncertain or partial, dependent on intuition or remaining in the sphere of pure hypothesis. But at least there are a few certainties from which one may begin. In the first place the tradition of the title of the collection is clear and incontestable: τὰ λόγια (the adjective Chaldaean seldom appears in our sources before the eleventh century[11]), which can be translated as 'the oracles', or better still, 'the words', with all the connotations that later antiquity gave to this complex and potent name. Indeed the two terms λόγια and ἔπη are combined in the title attributed by the Suda to a work by Julian the Theurgist – λόγια δι' ἐπῶν – which may well be this very collection of oracles. Damascius also talks about ἔπη: ἐν οἷς ἔπεσι λέγουσι[12] – 'the words (or hexameters) in which they speak'; but who are *they*? Here too there seems to be agreement in our sources: the subject of the verb λέγουσι is οἱ θεοί – the gods.[13] But which gods? At this point the mists begin to gather over our enquiry. In their present state the oracles do not generally reveal the identity of the god who speaks, apart from Hecate, but references in later writings make it clear that a whole crowd of gods, each recognizable by his special attributes, appeared and delivered their message to the theurgist.[14] The recipient of the divine message was, according to the sources, ὁ θεουργός, 'the person who works on the divine', he who through his personal effort makes the light descend and become concrete and articulate.

There is also agreement about the actual recipient: a man called Julian (like his father), who was known as 'the Theurgist'. Here we must distinguish – as the sources themselves insist – between the primordial Theurgist who received the divine revelation and the theurgists generally, those masters of wisdom and sanctity who from at least the time of Iamblichus

come to inhabit the Roman empire. Some of them were mere technicians of the supernatural, whom Iamblichus would denounce in scathing language, but the true theurgist – a man like Nestorius, Aedesius or Proclus – was a benefactor of humanity who produced divine epiphanies, received oracles and performed miracles for the common good. This new sociological type, a pendant to the Christian ascetic, did not suddenly erupt into the Roman world with Julian the Theurgist. Launched by Iamblichus, and adopted for practical purposes by the emperor Julian, the model of the theurgical sage (the ἐπιστήμων θεουργός) represents the final link in a long chain of mutations and adaptations of very ancient – indeed Chaldaean – notions and procedures.[15] The story of the contact and the fusion between the religious traditions of Babylon and the intellectual currents of the Hellenistic world is long, complicated and partly unexplored, but it is from this promiscuous milieu that at some point in the latter part of the second century AD there emerged a man called Julian the Theurgist who 'worked on the gods' with startling success – unless it was the gods who worked on him in order to bestow on humanity a complete revelation (both etymologies being possible). However this may be, the adjective 'Chaldaean', which constitutes the 'surname' of Julian the Theurgist's father, an adjective which may have both an ethnic and a professional meaning – as Lewy (1978, 428) and Dodds (1961, 271) remind us – invites us to undertake a journey in time and space.

From the Persian Gulf to Syria

Dominated by the Temple of Bel-Marduk with its hanging gardens, Babylon was for the ancient world – from Persia to Greece – a powerful symbol of secular and spiritual glory. Extending his empire far beyond the boundaries of Chaldaea, Bel-Marduk soon became known simply as Bel or Baal – 'the Lord'.[16] In Apamea and Palmyra his name served as an epithet of the cosmic deity Adad, whom Proclus identifies with the Δὶς Ἐπέκεινα or Twice Beyond of the Chaldaean Oracles.[17] But how 'Babylonian' did Bel remain? In an important study, Nicole Belayche (2000) has shown that, despite their actual or supposed roots, the 'oriental' gods of the Greco-Roman world have a more or less Roman personality. Thus it is safe to assume that in the course of his Hellenistic peregrinations, the divine metic from Chaldaea underwent substantial transformations while retaining a hard core from his native theology – τὰ πάτρια δόγματα τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, to which Iamblichus refers (*Myst.* I.2) – as well as some of his most striking characteristics. The god seems to have also retained his ministers and friends, that clergy of experts – prophets and sages – always open to new ideas, but at the same time proud of their age-old tradition.[18]

In the second century AD the Roman world boasted two magnificent temples of Bel in cities with partly contiguous territories: Palmyra and Apamea. By contrast with the situation in Apamea, where nothing remains of the sacred complex,[19] the ruins of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra still evoke something of its former majesty, its symbolic and actual significance, even of its very secrets. Outside the sacred precinct the stones speak of the identity of the inhabitants of the desert city: the Chaldaeans. This is how the name 'KLDY on several Palmyrene funerary inscriptions can best be read, as Dr Jean-Baptiste Yon has recently confirmed to me in a private communication, in which he also asserted the dual character of the adjective functioning at once as a family name and a professional designation.[20] I can see nothing improbable in the idea that a family with the part-ethnic, part-professional name 'Chaldaean' (one may think in this connection of the Eumolpids or the Branchids) filled the hereditary office of priest in the Temple of Bel, in Palmyra or Apamea. That Julian the Chaldaean may have been a member of this caste seems to me equally plausible. But whatever the significance of his name, Julian the Chaldaean was, according to the Suda, 'a philosopher', a qualification which automatically brings to mind that second-century AD priest of Bel who, at the same time as serving his god, was the head of the Epicurean School at Apamea.[21] But Aurelius Belius Philippus (whose theophoric name is a fascinating compound of Semitic, Greek and Roman elements) presents us with a problem: in a world in which the Epicurean philosophers carried on a systematic campaign against the oracular establishments, how could this priest of a divinatory god reconcile his loyalties? A first attempt towards providing an answer to this paradox has been made by M.F. Smith (1996) who shows by analysing specific examples that, despite a certain inconsistency of principle, the holding of an oracular priesthood could be – and in practice was – combined with the profession of Epicurean philosophy, each time for a different reason. In the case of Aurelius Belius (who, if personally acquainted with Numenius, could be responsible for the favourable picture that the Apamean philosopher paints of the Epicurean communities of his day[22]) one may put forward another hypothesis: it may be that by the second century his god had changed his style, specializing in a new form of divination – or rather revelation – which was to put an end to conventional prophecy as practised in the Greek world since earliest antiquity.

Numenius

Much more important for our purposes than the philosopher-priest of Apamea with his oecumenical name and contradictory functions is his fellow-citizen, the elusive Numenius, who also lived in the second

century AD. Very little of what Numenius wrote survives, but the scanty fragments of his work in combination with the comments of later (mainly Christian) authors are sufficient to establish his unique originality. The main points of his achievement may be summarized as follows. First, Numenius viewed the religious heritage of humanity as an indivisible whole and called for an understanding of the Greek philosophical tradition in the light of 'the initiations, dogmas and rituals of the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi and the Egyptians' (fr. 1a). Secondly, he redefined Platonism by dissociating Plato from his self-appointed successors, whom in a critical, even defamatory, history of philosophy entitled *On the divorce of the Academics from Plato* he showed to be mere technicians who had perverted the master's doctrines and betrayed his spirit.[23] Thirdly, he claimed that in order to understand Plato one must hark back to Pythagoras, indeed that Platonism in its original state is pure Pythagoreanism; hence Numenius himself is invariably referred to by the Ancients as a Pythagorean. Finally, and most importantly, in a work of great spiritual depth entitled *On the Good*, he described the mystic experience of union with God both in theological and in psychological terms in such a way as to open up new paths to philosophical speculation.

The relationship between the system which emerges from Numenius' meagre fragments and the theology of the Chaldaean Oracles has tormented scholars for more than a century: there is general agreement that the affinities between the two systems are too striking to be ascribed to the *Zeitgeist* alone. And on a more concrete level the use of language provides a sure indication of the direct influence of one author on the other. Thus, addressing mankind in his role as Plato's inspired exegete, Numenius proclaims the following:

> Oh mankind, what you consider as the First Intellect is not that at all; before it there is another Intellect more venerable and more divine (fr. 17).

This exhortation finds its twin in two lines of the Chaldaean Oracles:

> 'For the Father created in perfection all things and handed them over to the Second Intellect, that you, the entire human race, call the First Intellect' (fr. 7).

If the linguistic parallels are not always as striking as in the case of the fragments just quoted, the doctrinal parallels between the two systems leave one in no doubt as to their interdependence. For some scholars Numenius was influenced by the Oracles; for others it is the other way round; and in 1961, revising his previous theories, E.R. Dodds spoke – with considerable caution, it is true – of a bridge between the two systems where

the traffic moved in two directions.[24] In spite of the fundamental differences in their metaphysics, the resemblances between the two texts suggest personal contact in a common milieu. Indeed if one listens carefully, one can hear the continuous dialogue between two individuals with distinct talents and vocations who have blossomed in the same environment.

Among the fragments from Numenius' treatise *On the Good* there is a remarkable passage in which he describes in language of great poetic beauty the union of the soul with the supreme good (fr. 2). But for this to happen, Numenius warns us, 'one needs a method not at all easy, a divine method'.[25] It is the combination of the term 'method' with the adjective 'divine' that makes one think of the Chaldaeans and of their *theurgical* methodology. Would it be overbold to suggest that Numenius, who was so much attracted by 'the dogmas, the rites and the initiations' of the East (fr. 1a), had a close relationship with the philosopher priests of the temple of his native city? When one considers everyday scenes in the courtyards and the prayer halls of mosques today one should have no great difficulty in visualizing how in Antonine times, in the shadow of the ancient trees of the temple of Bel at Apamea, philosophy mingled with religion, and tradition with new trends in an act of cross-fertilization, until, inspired by his conversations with Numenius and many other anonymous sages, a priest by the name of Julian, following an ancient practice, fell into a trance and pronounced hexameter verses in the theological idiom of the age and the region.[26] This revelation, which by its methodology of inspiration stems from the divinatory tradition of the Chaldaeans as practised in their temples since the Palaeo-Babylonian era, would have been 'dictated' or 'given' to the prophet at intervals over many years, perhaps even decades, before ending up – one will never know exactly how – in the form of a sacred book consisting of a cosmological, moral and soteriological teaching and of a set of ritual and dietary rules and instructions whose ultimate aim was deification.

'Like the Hermetic writings, the Sibylline Oracles and the magical texts', writes Pierre Hadot, 'the Chaldaean Oracles were a book of revelation in constant evolution, to which new texts were continually being added.' (Lewy 1978, 706). One must attempt to qualify this 'continually'. For my part I believe that the codification of the text occurred early on, perhaps even in the lifetime of the two Julians, and that this is why there was a need for so much exegesis, as in the parallel case of the Koran.

The paternity of the Chaldaean Oracles

The moment has come to examine the credentials of Julian the Theurgist. According to a tradition which goes back at least as far as Proclus, just before the birth of his son, Julian the Chaldaean addressed a prayer to the

'Holder of the All' requesting that his son should be endowed with an archangelic soul.[27] And after the boy was born, the father put his soul in contact with (συνέστησε) all the gods and also with the soul of Plato which dwelt with Apollo and Hermes.[28] Let us attempt to analyse this story which lies at the heart of Neoplatonic mythology. A first important point concerns the collaboration of father and son in producing the oracles, hence the plural form 'the Chaldeans' or 'the theurgists' that one encounters so often in the sources;[29] then, against a syncretistic background, in which Jewish theology plays an important part, there appears the orientalizing Plato of Numenius, 'purified' of his dubious Sceptic progeny: his most intimate secrets – τὰ παρὰ Πλάτωνι ἀπόρρητα, on which Numenius wrote a book (fr. 23) – are finally to be revealed to humanity.[30] This revelation had to be put into writing, but not in the manner of the Orphic poems, products of simple theologians, where the commentary continually contaminates the divine message, or in that of the revelation of Hermes Trismegistus, where the plurality of the exegesis is interwoven with the original instruction. In the case of the Oracles *the gods had spoken* – a point emphasized by our philosophers[31] – in order to give a total revelation, a canon to be preserved for all time in its original form.

Literality as an agent of intolerance

But when did the *Logia* acquire the finality of the canonical book that Iamblichus and all his successors grant them? And how? By what processes did they obtain this status? These are difficult, if not impossible, questions. One could, however, with the aid of a better documented diachrony attempt to reconstruct the chain of events: from a certain moment onwards, and with the encouragement of his father who had, as we learn from the story preserved by Psellus, 'programmed' him to this effect, Julian the Theurgist began to fall into trances and in a state of possession utter more or less comprehensible verses, which those present wrote down on the spot. If we are to believe Iamblichus, this was no mere technique. Julian was the elect of the gods; his illumination was αὐτοφανὴς καὶ αὐτοθελής – the work of the gods alone.[32]

It is likely that the nature of the prophet's outpourings resulted in several different versions being recorded by his audience. This was the case in modern times with Ismael Emre, an illiterate Turkish welder from Adana, who from the 1930s onwards, when he was himself in his thirties, used to fall into a trance and pronounce verses in the language of an age-old tradition. In this way he produced more than two thousand poems – or rather songs – which to this day circulate among his pupils and relatives.[33] But he never learned to read and write, and I suspect that he deliberately

chose to remain illiterate in order to be more 'transparent' to the divine. After he had finished his recitation all the variants were submitted to him and he himself made the necessary amendments to produce an authoritative text. Julian may have acted similarly – or he may have done nothing at all, and from the very moment of the birth of the divine verses there existed, for a time, a variety of readings, what we might call parallel – or even apocryphal – versions of the Oracles. An important indication in this respect is provided by John Lydus who explains why many of the verses of the 'Chaldaean' Sibyl are imperfect: this is due to the incompetence of the stenographers – οὐ συμφθασάντων τῇ ῥύμῃ τῶν λεγομένων ἢ καὶ ἀπαιδεύτων γενομένων καὶ ἀπείρων γραμματικῶν.[34] And why did not the Sibyl correct the secretaries' mistakes? Because, says Lydus, from the moment when inspiration ceased, the memory of what she had pronounced abandoned her as well.[35]

To come back to Julian the Theurgist, at some point he seems to have produced (perhaps in collaboration with his father?) a book called Λόγια δι' ἐπῶν.[36] It is at that moment that the text would be closed for ever. At no point do the Neoplatonists mention variant readings or correct the text, as Porphyry does with the oracles in his *Philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*.[37] For this reason I suspect that the idea of untouchability was innate in the Chaldaean revelation, that any tampering with the text ceased with the death of the two Julians, when the late antique rule of μήτε προσθεῖναι μήτ' ἀφελεῖν would have been applied to the Oracles.[38] From this point onwards the tradition of the speech would no longer be open to creative reproduction, the Oracles having been granted the status of canonical book, which would in itself become a sacred object whose supernatural power did not necessarily depend on an understanding of the meaning of its words.

But before talking of the duality text/object, it might be useful to consider some extracts from a ninth-century work – Al-Bukhari's *Sahih* – which reproduces *hadiths* – Islamic oral traditions – going back to the middle of the seventh century: 'Zayd ibn Thabit said: "then I sought out and collected the parts of the Qur'an, whether written on palm leaves or flat stones or in the hearts of men (...)". Anas ibn Malik said: "Hudhayfa was shocked by the differences in their reading of the Qur'an, and said to 'Uthman: 'O Commander of the Faithful, catch this community before they differ about their book as do the Jews and Christians' ". 'Uthman sent to Hafsa to say "Send us the leaves. We shall copy them in codices and return them to you." (...) They did this, and when they had copied the leaves into codices, 'Uthman returned the leaves to Hafsa. He sent copies of the codex which they made in all directions and gave orders to burn every leaf or codex which differed from it.'[39]

What I would choose to retain from the story of the codification of the Koran, as it has reached us through the oral tradition, is firstly that the person entrusted by Caliph 'Uthman with the task of assembling the chapters of the holy book was shocked by the divergencies between the different hands; secondly – and most importantly – that having produced the canonical version of the Koran 'Uthman decreed that every alternative reading should be obliterated. One recalls in this connection the story of the burning of the library of Alexandria – a story with many variants – and the logic behind it.[40] Whether real or fictitious, these two events from early Ummayad times provide us with the parameters of the sacred for late antiquity: a draconian purge of all that lies within the domain of the sacred and the annihilation of everything that surrounds it.

These two incidents illustrate the supreme goal of the religion of the Book, an ideal which was only partially realized in the course of history. But in tracing this path further back we encounter Proclus who for the greater part of the fifth century reiterated that, if he had the power, he would preserve from the whole of ancient literature only the Chaldaean Oracles and the *Timaeus* (in that order) destroying the rest as irrelevant or even pernicious to humanity. Significantly this is the closing sentence of the *Life of Proclus* or *On Bliss* (38). Of all the aphorisms uttered in a long career of philosophical pronouncements, the formulation of this unfulfilled vow appeared to his biographer as *the* memorable quotation, the very essence of the master's teaching, and consequently the words with which to conclude the treatise *On Bliss*. In the light of later developments, Marinus should be congratulated for his perceptiveness and even his quasi-prophetic flair.

Leaving Proclus and retracing our steps even further, we come to the middle of the fourth century, when the supreme pontiff of Hellenism wrote to his priestly subordinates: 'Let us close all access to the teachings of Epicurus and of Pyrrhon. Already, it is true, a benefaction from the Gods has destroyed their works to the extent that most have disappeared' (Julian *Ep.* 89b, 301c). The logic behind the Emperor Julian's exhortation is the same as that of Proclus and 'Uthman, even if the ideology that inspires it seems to be less radical. For the young caliph of paganism his religion possessed one sacred text revealed to humanity by the gods – the Chaldaean Oracles – and one commentator of absolute authority – Iamblichus: all the rest was of secondary importance. At the beginning of his political career, when he had to conceal his religious beliefs, the Caesar Julian wrote to one of his former tutors: 'Hunt out for me everything that Iamblichus has written about my namesake. Only you can do it. Your sister's husband owns a carefully revised copy. And if I am not mistaken, a miraculous sign comes before me as I write these words' (*Ep.* 12). The mere mention of the names of the prophet of

Hellenism and of his inspired exegete were thus sufficient to transport Julian to a supernatural atmosphere. And in his most systematic writing, the *Hymn to King Helios*, in which he confesses to having drawn everything from Iamblichus, Julian reveals what were to his mind the supreme authorities of Hellenic theology: the *Timaeus* for physics and the Oracles for metaphysics, ethics and ritual – as in fact Proclus never ceased to repeat.

The idolatry of the Book

Late antique monuments proclaim the soteriological action of the Book with the same force as Julian and Proclus. Indeed from as early as the first century BC, the book appears as a symbol of salvation, combining the notion of study with that of initiation. M.I. Rostovtzeff and Jerome Carcopino have analysed in famous pages the initiatory scenes from Pompeii and Rome, and H.-I. Marrou has introduced us to the *mousikos anēr* of the Roman sarcophagi who, scroll in hand, proclaims the virtues of a *paideia* transfigured by the soteriological action of the sacred Book.[41] His work – and most recently that of Björn Ewald – calls our attention to the growing popularity of a theme formerly exclusively associated with mystery cells. As Paul Zanker has shown in a work where sensitivity vies with erudition, from the third century onwards pagans and Christians increasingly use the same iconographic formulae – a visual *koine*, as one might put it – to express a common theological message: the Book, in the form of the scroll or the codex,[42] appears as the supreme repository of the wisdom, inspiration and salvation that the figure represented offers to the viewer (Zanker 1995, 277 ff.).

A sacred object endowed with magical power, at once sanctified and sanctifying, the book is not only a constant motif of late antique iconography but also an increasingly common literary theme. Thus in his hymn to all the gods, Proclus implores them to illuminate him by the intermediary of the sacred books – ζαθέων ἀπὸ βίβλων (IV.5), a religious formula which may well refer to the Chaldaean Oracles. And in his address to the Muses, he expresses his gratitude to the Nine Sisters for having revealed to him the mysteries ἐγερσινόων ἀπὸ βίβλων – 'by the mediation of the books which awaken the spirit'.[43]

The temple of Bel or the hidden revelation

In this world without frontiers which elevated the Book into an object of worship, Hellenism too became a culture of the Book. At the epicentre of this development, which occurred between the second and the fifth centuries, lies a revealed text whose connection with Apamea is suggested by a number of convergent indicators.

I have already put forward certain thoughts on the prehistory and the birth of the sacred verses. According to my hypothesis, their author was a philosopher-priest in the Temple of Bel at Apamea, a famous oracular centre, where the temporal masters of the world, actual or potential, came to be informed as to their destiny and that of the empire (J. Balty 1981). Septimius Severus consulted the god on two occasions, as a private citizen before 192 and as emperor a decade later (Dio Cass. 79.8.5–6), while Macrinus came just before his fatal defeat of 218 to seek out what the future had in store for him (Dio Cass. 79.40.4). In both cases the god pronounced truthful oracles, quoting Homeric lines. Yet, while constituting evidence for the great renown of the temple at the end of the second century, these oracles provide no indication of the manner – theurgic or not – in which they were delivered.

A possible link does, however, exist between the Chaldaean Oracles and the Temple of Bel: this is a bilingual dedication to Bel 'governor of Fortune' and 'lord of the νοῦς' (*Figs.* 1 and 2)[44] on an altar at distant Vaison-la-Romaine in Provence. The dedicator, a certain Sextus, may well have been the father of the emperor Elagabalus, but his identity is not the point at issue here. It is the key words of the bilingual inscription which open up a truly fascinating field of speculation. The Greek text reads as follows:

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Εἰθυντῆρι Τύχης Βήλῳ Σέξστος θέτο βωμὸν τῶν ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ μνησάμενος λογίων: 'To the governor of Fortune, Belus, Sextus has dedicated an altar, in remembrance of the oracles to be found at Apamea', and the Latin: *Belus Fortunae rector mentisque magister ara gaudebit quam dedit et voluit*: 'Belus, governor of Fortune, lord of the *Nous* will rejoice in the altar that Sextus has dedicated to him with all his heart' [lit. 'which he has given and wanted'].[45]

Identical with the Twice Beyond of the Oracles, the Bel-Adad of our two inscriptions may be equated with the paternal principle or the first hypostasis of the Chaldaean trinity, the second being the νοῦς πατρικὸς or 'mens' of the Latin version. But what is of crucial importance to this argument is the phrase of the Greek inscription τῶν ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ λογίων. This seems to be a clear allusion to a sacred text (τὰ λόγια of the Neoplatonists) deposited at Apamea (ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ) in the Temple of Bel itself.[46] If so, even more than the memory of Numenius, what would then have attracted Amelius and especially Iamblichus to Apamea was the authoritative copy of the Sacred Book, on which our philosophers would work in the treasury of the temple, rather as Porphyry worked in the chresmographion of the oracle at Didyma or as philologists of today work in the libraries of mediaeval colleges and monasteries.

But Iamblichus was not only an avid researcher; he was above all an administrator of genius and an inspired teacher, 'the divine leader of the chorus of philosophers' who gave Apamea the status of a holy city.[47] It was because of him that 'those desiring knowledge flocked [to Apamea] from everywhere', as Eunapius tells us (*V.Phil.* V.1.4). Iamblichus welcomed them to a communal life where school discipline went hand in hand with the intimacy of the philosophical circle. A variety of direct and indirect sources evoke the ambience of this communal life with its solemnities and its diversions, its ritual routines and its moments of reflection and contemplation. The pupils spent several years at Apamea before becoming fully-fledged philosophers and statesmen who set their mark on the political and intellectual life of the empire (Athanassiadi 1995). Where did these people live and above all where did they receive their instruction?

This is a question to which no sure answer can be given, though the building under the so-called 'Eastern Cathedral', with its allegorical mosaics, which has been proposed by the archaeologists of the Belgian Mission as 'Iamblichus' school', is a plausible candidate for the house where he and his students lived (J.Ch. Balty 1972a, b; J. Balty 1995). Whether it was Iamblichus' school, as J.Ch. Balty suggests, or the private dwelling of a man steeped in Neoplatonism,[48] this house with its remarkable decorative programme was certainly viewed as a sacred place of Hellenism, since it was in order

to obliterate this function and reverse its spirituality that a martyrion – probably that of the Holy Cross – was built on top of it.[49] And this leads us to the second indication which points to the hypothesis that the Sacred Book of the Neoplatonists was preserved at Apamea.

A persistent legend echoed in both Greek and Arab sources makes of Apamea the recipient and the guardian of one half of the holy cross. Agapius of Hierapolis relates how the mother of Emperor Constantine found in Jerusalem the cross of Christ broken in two, and took one half to Apamea and the other to Constantinople.[50] That one part of the cross was preserved in the treasury of the Apamea cathedral (identified by J.Ch. Balty with the church which replaced the martyrion erected over the 'Neoplatonic school') was an undisputed fact in the sixth century. Evagrius Scholasticus (*c.* 536–600), who came from Hama, tells us how, when he was a child, his mother took him on a pilgrimage to Apamea to worship the sacred piece of wood (*HE* IV.26); and in his account of Chosroes' invasion of 540, Procopius refers in passing to a version of the provenance of the cross which is certainly nearer to the truth than that of Agapius. Procopius writes: 'There is at Apamea a piece of wood, a cubit in length, which was brought there in secret by a Syrian long ago' (*Bell.* II.11.14). Would it be over-bold to suggest that when the fame of the sacred oracles at the Temple of Bel acquired dangerous dimensions, arrangements were made to transfer to Apamea 'in secret', as Procopius says, a so-called fragment of the cross of Christ to thwart the action of the pagan relic? And that it was at that precise moment that the totally improbable story of Helen and her two pieces of wood was invented? To shelter the quintessential object of martyrdom, and in accordance with established practice, a symbolic site of the rival religion would then be chosen for the building of a martyrion. It is even possible that the transfer, real or fictitious, of the Christian relic was directly linked with the destruction of the Temple of Bel, which in itself furnishes the third pointer to my hypothesis.

The combined evidence of two ecclesiastical historians of the fifth century – Theodoret and Sozomen – suggests that an edict ordering the demolition of temples specifically in the city of Apamea and its countryside was promulgated by Theodosius in the 380s.[51] The recipient of the edict would have been the Praetorian Prefect of the East, Maternus Cynegius, an ardent and eristic Christian. According to Theodoret, Cynegius arrived at Apamea in 386 at the head of a force of two thousand men, and immediately set them to work to pull down the temple. Yet 'seeing that the structure was exceptionally compact and solid, he realized that no human effort could destroy the nexus of stones'. At that point the local bishop Marcellus appeared, 'and sent the praetorian prefect away to other cities,

while he himself prayed to God to reveal to him the way of demolishing the edifice'. After several unsuccessful attempts on his part, the gigantic temple was eventually destroyed by fire in the first act of vandalism committed by a bishop against a monument in the Roman empire. What followed is even more interesting. As an exploratory dig in 1981 confirmed, the whole area surrounding the temple was desecrated and used as a rubbish dump, until in the sixth century the road leading to the abandoned sanctuary was blocked by latrines: 'une véritable *damnatio memoriae*', as Janine Balty put it, 'à la mesure du rôle considérable qu'avait joué le sanctuaire à l'époque de sa splendeur.'[52]

At this point the historian must ask two questions. Firstly why such ferocious intensity on the part of the civil and religious authorities against a specific monument? The present state of the literary and archaeological evidence is insufficient to provide an answer to this intriguing question. Secondly, what was the Apameans' response to this act of pious vandalism? The same ecclesiastical authors inform us that shortly afterwards Marcellus received the same treatment that he had meted out to the temple: the Apameans seized him and burned him alive. Here one may open a parenthesis: it may be that, while the bishop was praying to God to reveal to him the best way of destroying the temple, its guardians took the opportunity of transferring the main treasures to a safe place. Why not the 'Neoplatonic school' on which the martyrion of the Holy Cross would later be built?

Among the objects saved from the holocaust may have been an instrument of Chaldaean divination. In August 1977 there was discovered in the so-called 'House of the Deer' a triangular bronze tray with a representation of triple Hecate (Donnay 1984). The theurgic associations of such an object are well known. The appellations Dione (Διώνη) and Amibousa (Ἀμίβουσα), inscribed respectively above the head and below the feet of the goddess, allude to her soteriological and divinatory functions. Dione, a mother-goddess of the first generation, is also an oracular deity; while the epithet ἀμείβουσα (='changing') is well suited to the feminine principle of the Oracles, that cosmic soul who crosses at will the frontiers separating the three worlds to bring salvation. The magical tripod of Apamea, which adds support to my theory of an Apamean origin for the Oracles, has its twin in the divinatory tripod from Pergamum (now in the Antikensammlung in Berlin), where Aedesius and other pupils of Iamblichus transferred the torch of renewed Hellenism.

A culture of commentators

With the Chaldaean revelation the prophetic cycle was closed for the Platonists. To their mind Julian the Theurgist represented 'the seal of the

Prophets', like Mani and Muhammad for their adepts, and consequently all the writings which preceded the *Logia* had to be examined in the light of the Chaldaean canon and either rejected or integrated into the framework offered by the new revelation, the total *apokalypsis*. We can therefore talk of a break with tradition. In spite of the obvious continuities, we can no longer speak in terms of the evolution of a mentality, but rather of radical transformation: a new attitude towards the religious phenomenon was born, dictated by the demands of a new era. With the creation of the holy text of Chaldaean oracles, an irreversible step was taken, for, in the succinct phrase of M. Vegetti, Greek Antiquity was 'une civilisation imprégnée d'écriture sans avoir jamais été une civilisation ni du Livre ni non plus des livres' (Vegetti 1998, 419).

To appreciate the originality of the Chaldaean oracles one must think of the conditions under which the Christian canon was born: it was in order to refute the Gnostics that the Apologists established a body of writings which eventually acquired a quasi-metaphysical status.[53] By contrast the Chaldaean oracles were *born as a canon*, as the text which would put an end to theological prophecy as such – at least in the view of those who adopted it as their sacred book. As in the parallel case of the Koran, there could be no more prophets after the Theurgist, only commentators.

But commentators on what? Only on the canon? And how about what preceded it? What was to be done with an age-old culture in the *lingua franca* of the civilized world? It had to be integrated. But according to what criterion? Naturally the criterion of revelation. 'What! Was it not the gods who revealed all their learning to Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Isocrates and Lysias? Did they not recognize themselves as consecrated, some to Hermes, others to the Muses?' It is the emperor Julian who pronounces these words in his famous law of 362, prohibiting the Christian teachers from passing on the wisdom that the gods had revealed to the Greek poets, orators and historians.[54] As for philosophers, the only ones to be read were 'those who, in their teaching, chose the gods as their guides – like Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the school of Chrysippus and Zeno' (*Ep.* 89b, 300d). It is again Julian who in his capacity as Pontifex Maximus addresses an encyclical letter to his clergy, banning all Epicurean and Pyrrhonean literature. Thus not all Greek culture was of divine origin; among the Ancients there were ill-inspired authors who left 'illicit' texts and, what was worse, there were false oracles too (as Plato had already pointed out, *Rep.* 364e). For this reason all the products of the Greek literary heritage had to be subjected to a test of authenticity before being integrated into the domain of the sacred, before the enviable status of *Praeparatio Chaldaïca* could be conferred on them.

What Julian did as much through his civil and religious legislation as through his exegetical and polemical work was to trace in a somewhat brutal manner a demarcation line in Hellenism between the sacred and the profane, between the authentic and the simulated.

Was then Julian a pioneer? Was the idea of sacred scriptures which bring to a close the era of prophecy and inaugurate that of systematization and exegesis something of his own making? By no means. Julian himself never ceases to repeat that all his inspiration comes from Iamblichus. His originality – what makes him a man of the future, in effect the first Byzantine basileus – lies in his manner of conceiving and putting into practice his imperial mission. It is this totalitarian conception and manner of wielding power that constitute his modernity. The absolutism of Julian in all fields (still not fully recognized because of his 'democratic' personal behaviour) derives from his unshakable conviction that the social and, even more, the spiritual well-being of the *oecoumenē* were confided to him by God, whose vice-regent on earth he was. Thus Julian was merely an administrator of the sacred, the man who through his privileged social position attempted to impose the Iamblichean *paideutic* model (Athanassiadi 1992b and 2001b).

By contrast, the immense task of systematizing the sum total of learning, both Greek and barbarian, for the purpose of creating a unique sacred culture crowned by a book of revelation, was conceived by Iamblichus. The path trodden by the exegetes who followed him is more or less familiar: the establishment of a dogma, which gave rise to the notion of an orthodoxy in whose name a perpetual war began to be waged.[55] In its devout disputatiousness the exegesis of the sacred book of the Neoplatonists ushers in the Middle Ages.

The Chaldaean Oracles as the precursor of the Koran

Contrary to the Jewish and Christian canons, which were established as a set of heterogeneous writings, the Oracles are a single text attributed to one *hypophet* and as such it may be described as the precursor of the Koran. Having evoked the analogies between the two sacred books, one must underline their major difference, which lies in the fact that, as the Recitation par excellence, the Koran is aimed at mankind in its entirety. In spite of its often cryptic language, the divine message is addressed to humanity, without any fear of being contaminated by contact with 'those who have a heart but do not feel, eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear' (Koran 7.179). For 'when you will recite the Koran we will hold between you and those who do not believe in the afterlife an impenetrable veil and we shall cover their hearts so that they cannot understand' (17.45), since 'faith is a gift which heaven dispenses at its will' (10.100).

By contrast the guardians of the Chaldaean revelation feel the need to protect the divine message from profane ears; they put a kind of embargo on their sacred text – even the theology students of the School of Athens are not considered worthy of hearing the exegesis of the holy verses (Marinus *V.Procl.* 26). Instead of being seen as the foundation of the religion around which a whole sacred literature revolves, instead of being preached to the whole world, the word of the gods is treated with the elitism reserved for their gnosis by the adepts of mystic movements on the margin of the established religious traditions. And yet this book appears as the quintessence of late antique modernity. Why, then, this secrecy in patent contradiction with the spirit of the age? One explanation might be that, in spite of being fully integrated in their society, the guardians of the Chaldaean revelation were contaminated by the ideology of orality at the basis of Platonism both old and new. Their half-conscious loyalty to the spirit of Plato would have prevented them from taking the decisive step to enter the era of oecumenism – the new era which offered everything to everybody, though by applying mechanisms of absolute control. But there is another explanation too.

Towards polarization

One thinks of the story of Numa: when the king died, two coffins were constructed according to his wishes – one for his body and another for the 24 sacred books written by him, in which he had given instruction to the priests personally, by 'activating' in them the very spirit of his teaching. Having accomplished this task, the king ordered them to bury the books with him 'since it was not good for the holy secrets to be preserved in lifeless letters' – ὡς οὐ καλῶς ἐν ἀψύχοις γράμμασι φρουρουμένων τῶν ἀπορρήτων (Plutarch, *Numa* 22.2). The 'holy secrets' of Numa consisted of twelve books of prophecy and twelve of Greek philosophical wisdom. In relating this story, Plutarch does not overlook the association with the Pythagorean practice of ἄγραφος παίδευσις – oral education.[56] But the story of Numa does not end there. Five hundred years after his death, torrential rains caused the disinterment of the coffin with the 'dead letters'. The praetor Petilius took them to the Senate where the *patres patriae* decided to entrust them to the flames, judging that 'it was sacrilege for the writings to become known to the people' (22.5–6). A true story? A Platonizing interpretation by Plutarch? One way or another, the idea that writing kills the message was current in Greco-Roman antiquity; ἐν ἀψύχοις γράμμασι says Plutarch, τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτέννει Paul writes to the Corinthians (II Cor. 3: 6): 'because the letter killeth'.

By the time of Paul and of Plutarch, however, these rhetorical formulae

no longer represented the majority view. Rather they were a protest against the cries of the vendors of packaged spirituality, the new orthodoxy which tended towards the sanctification of the wrapping of the sacred discourse rather than the discourse itself. Against the untouchability of the letter rose the voice of those who envisaged writing as a necessary evil, a technique which made life easier to the detriment of essence. At the point when the Chaldaean Oracles were born, these two – albeit polarized – attitudes still existed side by side. The tyranny of the Book, in whose name the burning of books took place, had not yet begun.

Notes

[1] On the return of the dead to the late antique city, see the remarks of Béatrice Caseau (1999, 36–8).

[2] See Mimouni 2002.

[3] In this respect cf. the collective volume Patlagean, Le Boulluec 1993, which is indicative as much of our wider preoccupations and anxieties as of our academic interests. On the interdependence of the written and the oral, see the very fine book by W.A. Graham 1993.

[4] For the story (and for Ammon's scepticism towards the use of writing) see Plato, *Phaedr.* 274c–e.

[5] For a discussion of the sources, and a partial translation into English, Neusner 1994; on the continuous manipulation of the tradition, Glucker 1978, 356–64.

[6] Thesis developed by G.R. Boys-Stones 2001.

[7] In the best of cases, writing was envisaged as a necessary evil, a technique which made life easier. As a provisional and impermanent system, writing for the Greeks was merely 'an alternative whose claims to be a definitive replacement for the other, lofty and solar, universe had to be kept under control' (M. Vegetti 1988, 418). For recent objections to this view, Riedweg 1998, 365, nn. 27–9, with references.

[8] The first person to recognize Chaldaean oracles among the quotations from Porphyry was H. Lewy, but E.R. Dodds 1961, 265–7 summarily refuted, or rather dismissed, this theory. While wondering why none of the so-called 'Chaldaean' oracles of the *Philosophy from the Oracles* are to be found in the works of later Neoplatonists, P. Hadot 1978, 712 refuses to pronounce thereon; finally R. Goulet, in putting forward his theory of the theurgical origin of the oracle of Apollo in the *Life of Plotinus*, touches on the problem without going into details (1982, 376, n. 3). While re-reading the *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda* (and one would be justified in suspecting that after the double intervention of Porphyry and of his sources the oracular verses appear neither in their original order nor in their original context) I was struck by the affinity, both formal and essential, of some of the verses with the Chaldaean Oracles. However this may be, the question of the Chaldaean origin of several of Porphyry's quotations should be re-opened, ideally in the context of a new critical edition of the *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*.

[9] A problem to which I have devoted a number of studies. See Athanassiadi 1991b and 1993, in addition to 1992a and 1999a already mentioned.

[10] Next to a Commentary on the Oracles, in which Porphyry discussed among other things the nature of the Second God – the *dis epekeina* of Chaldaean theology (Lydus *Mens.* IV, 53, p. 110, 18–22; cf. Marinus *V.Procl.* 26; Suda s.v. 'Porphyrios'), he seems to have included Chaldaean material in the *De regressu animae* (Augustine *Civ. Dei* X.32) and, I believe, in his *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda.*

[11] Cf. Damascius, *Philosophical History* fr. 145b. For the terms χαλδαϊκὰ ῥητὰ | χαλδαϊκὸν λόγιον see Psellos, *Philosophica Minora* II (D.J. O'Meara), opusc. 38.

[12] *PP* (Westerink/Combès) II,105,1–2:...τοὺς θεοὺς ἐν οἷς ἔπεσι λέγουσι πρὸς τὸν θεουργόν.

[13] See indicatively, Julian, *Or.* VIII (Bidez) 175b, 178d; Proclus *In Remp.* II,242,8; 1,39,18 as well as the phrase of Damascius quoted in the previous note.

[14] Iles Johnston 1990. Note the revealing passages from Proclus, *In Tim.* I,166,1 ff., III,131,26 – 132,4, which imply that Zeus, Osiris, Dionysos, Helios, Pan and Artemis are the authors of the Chaldaean revelation, as well as Hecate. Most important was of course Bel Adad, evoked in the hexametric phrase εὔυμνον Ἄδαδον, as reconstructed by A.D. Nock, who recovers the Greek from the Latin *valde hymnizabilem Adadon* of Proclus' *In Parmenidem* (Nock 1959). It is likely that Isis too formed part of the divine chorus (cf. my reconstruction of the Chaldaean hexameter <Ἶσίν τ'>ἀενάου ζωῆς ὀχετοῖς ἀμετρήτοις from the text of Damascius (*Philosophical History* fr. 3, Athanassiadi 1999b, 77, n. 6).

[15] On 'theurgy' in Babylonia, see Bottéro 2000.

[16] For all this see Athanassiadi 1999a, 153, 154, nn. 19 and 21.

[17] *In Parm.* 60,3 (Klibansky/Labowsky). An extremely important, though fragmentary and allusive discussion between M. Theiler and P. Hadot on the identity of the Chaldaean Ἄπαξ | Δὶς Ἐπέκεινα is to be found in Fondation Hardt 1966, 80, 83. Combining the text of Lydus (*Mens.* IV.53, p. 110, 18–22) with Victorinus (*Adv. Ar.* I,50,22 and 51,1), Macrobius (*Sat.* I.23.17) and Proclus (*In Parm.* 60,6) Hadot comes to the conclusion that the pun Ad-Ad/Unum-Unum or Unus-Unus was common in the discussions on the identity of the First and the Second God in late antique philosophical circles.

[18] Berossus had set a good precedent in this regard.

[19] See below, n. 52.

[20] Letter of 16.9.2000. Among other information, Dr Yon states the following: 'dans les textes cités, il est possible que le terme fonctionne...comme un 'nom de famille', qui désignerait alors un clan (par son lieu d'origine?). Il peut s'agir d'un nom de métier de ce type (quelques médecins, mais la fonction ne se transmet pas dans la famille). Mais il est possible qu'une occupation aussi particulière ('mage, magicien') se soit transmise de père en fils'. I am most grateful to Dr Yon for his assistance on this point. For a different reading of the word 'KLDY and the relevant discussion, see Athanassiadi 1999a, 154, n. 23.

[21] For the inscription, Rey-Coquais 1973 (with the corrections to the text by M.F. Smith, 1996). For the date, Rey-Coquais 1973, pl. V 2, 84 together with

the remarks of Smith (1996, 121, 125, 127) and of P.L. Gatier *BE* (1997) No. 639; cf. also the following note.

[22] In his history of the Academy, Numenius makes a point of contrasting the infidelity of Plato's pupils towards their founder with the attitude of the Epicureans, whose respect for their master and his doctrine he sees as the hallmark of the ideal philosophical community: cf. fr. 24, 26 ff.

[23] Substantial remains of this work are represented by frs. 24–8.

[24] For a summary of the question, E.R. Dodds (Fondation Hardt 1960, 10–11, where the phrase describing the Chaldaean Oracles as 'theosophical rubbish' occurs). More important is his statement in Dodds 1961, 271: 'some sort of bridge must have linked the two systems; but I find it hard to be quite sure which way the traffic ran. It could even have been a two-way traffic, since (...) Numenius and Julianus may well have been contemporaries'.

[25] τῷ γὰρ ὄντι οὐ ῥᾳδίας, θείας δὲ πρὸς δεῖ μεθόδου.

[26] For references, see Athanassiadi 1999a, 151, n. 10.

[27] In his Περὶ τοῦ πῶς ἐμψυχοῦται τὰ ἔμβρυα (K. Kalbfleisch, *Abhandl. Berl. Akad.* 1895, p. 35), Porphyry attributes to Numenius and the Pythagoreans the doctrine according to which the combined ardour of the two sexes during copulation seizes a flying soul. Also shared by Iamblichus, who clearly follows Numenius on this point (Stob. *Anth.* I, p. 381, 15 ff.), the theory of animation at conception is rejected by Porphyry. The 'archangelic' soul of Julian contains more than a hint of the Jewish theology which so fascinated Numenius, cf. frs 1, 8, 9, 10, 30, 52 and Winden 1959, 123.

[28] Psellus, Περὶ τῆς χρυσῆς ἁλύσεως τῆς παρ' Ὁμήρῳ, *Philosophica Minora* I (J.M. Duffy), opusc. 46, 44–51.

[29] Τὰ σύστοιχα τῶν Χαλδαίων συγγράμματα (Marinus *V.Procl.* 26), a phrase specifically referring to the father and the son and therefore reinforcing the evidence of the inscriptions; τῶν θεῶν εἰπόντων πρὸς τοὺς θεουργούς (Proclus *In Remp.* II,242,8); οἱ θεουργοὶ παρ' αὐτῶν θεῶν διδαχθέντες (Dam. *PP* (Westerink/Combès) III,109,4–5); τοῖς θεουργοῖς οἱ θεοὶ ...ἐκδεδώκασι (Dam. *PP* III,109,15–16).

[30] In this regard the verb ἐποπτεύω used by Psellos seems to me significant.

[31] Marinus *V.Procl.* 26: τὰ θεοπαράδοτα λόγια. Cf. nn. 12 and 13.

[32] *Myst.* I.12; cf. ibid. III.20: παρὰ μόνων θεῶν ἡ τῶν θείων ἔργων ἐνδίδοται κατόρθωσις.

[33] See Athanassiadi 2001a; and Athanassiadi 1991a (a selection of 99 poems with translation into Greek).

[34] Lydus *Mens.* IV.47, p. 102, 19–21.

[35] Ibid. 21–2: Ἅμα γὰρ τῇ ἐπιπνοίᾳ ἐπέπαυτο ἐν αὐτῇ ἡ τῶν λεχθέντων μνήμη.

[36] Suda II, 642, 1. According to Lydus (*Mens.* IV.47, p. 103, 1–2), the Sibyl of Delphi ἔγραψε χρησμοὺς δι' ἐπῶν, an expression which is all the more significant if one considers the close relationship of Lydus with Proclus' circle and his direct knowledge of the Chaldaean revelation. In this connection, see now Kaldellis 2003.

[37] Prologue (ed. Smith fr. 303F, 17–22).

[38] On this increasingly important notion in late antiquity, see Le Boulluec 1985, 250–3.

[39] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih* 3.392–4, in B. Lewis (ed. and trans.) *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, vol. II: *Religion and Society*, New York 1974, pp. 1–2.

[40] For the basic version see Butler 1978, 401–3. The Iranian version of the story concerning the annihilation of all Persian wisdom is reported by Ibn Haldun.

[41] Respectively Rostovtzeff 1927, 137–9, 116–20; Carcopino 1927, 117 ff.; Marrou 1938, 260–2. For a more recent discussion of the evidence, Sauron 1998.

[42] It is worth pointing out that the sacrality of the book is not unconnected with the birth of the codex: Roberts, Skeat 1983.

[43] The hypothesis of Westerink, repeated by H.-D. Saffrey 1981, that this particular hymn of Proclus was specifically dedicated to the gods of the Chaldaean Oracles is unprovable, as noted by R.M. van den Berg 2001, 224, 227.

[44] Now at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint-Germain-en-Laye (MAN 11058).

[45] *IG* 2482 and *CIL* XII 1277. For a commentary on the bilingual inscription and a discussion of the problematic expression 'dedit et voluit', Veyne 1986, 276–9.

[46] For a different explanation of the plural λόγια, instead of the expected λόγιον, Turcan 1972, 116.

[47] Libanius *Or.* 52.21 and *Ep.* 1389.

[48] As suggested by P.-A. Février during the discussion which followed the papers of J.Ch. Balty 1972a, b.

[49] For an account of the stages of construction on the site (first a house, then a martyrion, and eventually (5th cent.) the 'Eastern Cathedral', an episcopal complex with the house of the bishop, offices and other dependencies), J.Ch. Balty, 1972b.

[50] *Kitab al-'Unvan Patrologia Orientalis* 8.3 (1912), 467–8.

[51] For what follows, Theodoret *HE* V. 21.5–16; Sozomen *HE* VII.15.11–15.

[52] J. Balty 1997. And for the quotation which concludes the paragraph, 798.

[53] Irenaeus, *Contr. Haer.* I.8.1; I.9.4; cf. the famous definition of the divine scriptures in Eusebius *HE* III.25.

[54] *Ep.* 61, 423a (Bidez-Cumont): here Julian repeats the interdiction of the Apostolic Tradition (third century), which barred admission to the Church to those who taught the Greek myths.

[55] Process described in Athanassiadi 2002.

[56] Cf. Iamblichus *V.Pyth.* 226: διατηροῦντες ἀγράφως ἐν μνήμῃ.

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VI

Canonizing Platonism: The Fetters of Iamblichus

This is the story of a group of people who called themselves Platonists, a name they chose in their desire to proclaim their affinity with 'the divine Plato', whose spirit had, to their mind, been betrayed by his self-appointed heirs, the Academics, through turning philosophy into a technical discipline. The main spokesman for this sentiment was the Syrian Numenius, who is normally classified by both ancient and modern historians of philosophy as a 'Pythagorean' (or even a 'Neopythagorean'). Whatever his identity, Numenius was a truly original thinker, who suffered the fate of many a pioneer: the paths he opened up were followed by others, while he himself received minimal credit or even none at all. Others appropriated his claim to originality, among them Plotinus and Iamblichus – two revisionist thinkers who, having fully digested Numenius' many-sided contribution, knew how to build on and propagate specific aspects of it.[1]

By calling themselves *Platonici*, these men and their followers emphasized the fact that to them the study of Plato was as much a spiritual as an intellectual pursuit, nothing less indeed than a way to salvation. Fully-fledged citizens of a world in which believers organized themselves into textual communities, the adepts of Platonism gradually built their own canonical library and, what is more, proceeded to create a whole hierarchy of scriptural holiness, which was reflected in a carefully structured curriculum of studies made up of primary and secondary scriptures.

This process may be seen as symptomatic of a more general trend, for the end of the second century saw the creation of the New Testament canon, and also the codification of the oral part of the Torah – the Mishnah – which represents 'the living words' (the λόγια ζῶντα) that Moses had received from God on Mount Sinai. How does Platonism fit into this landscape? Of direct relevance to this question is the book which has been described as 'the Bible of the

1. See Athanassiadi, *Lutte*, 89-93 and 145-150.

Neoplatonists', a divine revelation in Greek hexameter verse, the so-called Chaldaean Oracles, which consisted of a cosmological, moral and soteriological teaching as well as a set of ritual and dietary rules and instructions whose ultimate aim was deification.

A combined reading of the diverse pieces of evidence at our disposal has led me to propose that the Chaldaean Oracles were produced in the milieu of the Temple of Bel at Apamea in the second century AD.[2] The author appears to have been a certain Julian, known as the Theurgist, a member of the hereditary caste of the Chaldaeans at Apamea (a priestly dynasty like the Eumolpids at Eleusis and the Branchids at Didyma), who, inspired by his conversations with Numenius and other anonymous sages, uttered while in a trance hexameters in the theological idiom of the age and the region. Rooted in the divinatory tradition of the Chaldaeans as practised in their temples since the Palaeo-Babylonian era, this revelation would have been 'given' or 'dictated' to the prophet at intervals over many years, perhaps even decades, before ending up – we may never know exactly how – in its final form as a sacred book.

A detail mentioned by the late fifth-century head of the Academy of Athens, Marinus, in his *Life of Proclus* allows us to deduce that the Chaldaean Oracles reached the status of a canonical text while Julian the Theurgist, the recipient of the divine revelation, and his father, also named Julian, who had 'programmed' him to that effect, were both still alive.[3] For according to the testimony of his pupil and successor, Proclus had read the voluminous commentaries which Porphyry and Iamblichus had written not only on the *Oracles* but also on the commentaries produced by the two Julians themselves (τὰ σύστοιχα τῶν Χαλδαίων συγγράμματα).[4] These exegetical writings presuppose a closed text, which could well have been deposited, according to a tradition followed in both the Semitic and the Greek world, in the adyton of the temple of Bel at Apamea.[5]

Whatever the link between the *Oracles* and the temple of Bel may have been, we know that in 269 Apamea became the chosen residence of the Italian

2. For detailed expositions of this theory, cf. Athanassiadi, 'Apamea', and *Lutte*, 38-70.
3. Just before the conception of his son, the elder Julian addressed a prayer to the 'Holder of the All' requesting that his son should be endowed with an archangelic soul, while immediately after his birth he put the boy's soul in contact with all the gods as well as with the soul of Plato: see Psellus, *Philosophica minora*, vol. I (Duffy), *opusc.* 46.44-51, together with Athanassiadi, *Lutte*, 48-50.
4. Marinus, *Vita Procli* (= *VPr*) 26.18-19 Saffrey, Segonds.
5. For a discussion of the evidence leading to this proposition, see Athanassiadi, *Lutte*, 59-66.

Amelius, Plotinus' long-standing favourite pupil and closest collaborator until the day in 263 when Porphyry arrived in Rome to usurp, as it were, his position. A great admirer of Numenius, whose works he knew by heart, Amelius spent the rest of his life teaching and writing in Apamea, until finally, in a symbolic gesture, he bequeathed his own edition of Plotinus' lectures to an adopted son, the Apamean Hostilianus Hesychius, who seems to have succeeded him as head of the learned community and to have perpetuated his mission.[6] We have now reached the very end of the third century, when the philosophical scene at Apamea is suddenly illuminated by the arrival of the divine Iamblichus.

Iamblichus of Chalcis (ca. 245-ca. 325)

A linear descendant of the priest-kings of Emesa, many of whom bore the same name as himself, Ya-mlik-el or Ya-mlik-u (which may be translated as 'God has counselled', 'may he rule!' or 'God's reign') was born around 245 in the frontier town of Chalcis in Syria. Both his theophoric name and his ancestry marked Iamblichus indelibly; indeed, until a few years before his birth, his house had ruled the *oikoumene*, and its main representatives, from Julia Domna to Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, had displayed a great interest in religious politics (sometimes, as in the case of Elagabalus, with disastrous consequences). Even after the end of the dynasty's imperial rule, at a time when Iamblichus was growing up in Chalcis, the Syrian *gens Iulia* continued to be immensely rich and powerful, and at least one of its members, the great priest of the Sun Uranius Antoninus, still claimed imperial status.[7]

Iamblichus inherited from his ancestry a sense of authority and a sense of mission; an administrative talent; a deep attachment to the land of Syria, its gods, values and traditions; and, finally, a strong taste for an old-fashioned lifestyle.[8] After receiving a solid classical education in his native Chalcis (as his fellow-countryman Rabbula was to do more than a hundred years later), Iam-

6. It is not irrelevant to the present discussion that Amelius bequeathed to Hostilianus his notes of Plotinus' lectures amounting to about one hundred books (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* [= *VPl*] 3.46-49).
7. On Uranius Antoninus and his successful campaign against the Persians in 253/4, see Potter *Prophecy and History*, 48-49 and 325-326; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 309; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, II, 302. For his coinage, see Baldus, *Uranius Antoninus*; cf. *Lutte*, 174-179.
8. Cf. Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum* (= *VPh*) 5.1.6 Giangrande.

blichus left his Syrian home to visit the most important intellectual centres of his day and become acquainted with the latest trends in Hellenistic philosophy. More specifically and more importantly, in Rome and in Alexandria Iamblichus dabbled in Pythagoreanism and in Hermetic wisdom, both of which shaped his understanding of the heritage of Plato. And after long years of peregrination, he returned home to settle in Apamea rather than in his native Chalcis, thus conferring on it the status of a holy city.[9]

As well as providing a prosopography of his most colourful pupils, Eunapius gives us an idea of the ethos of the community that began to gather around Iamblichus. 'He had a multitude of disciples, as those desiring knowledge flocked to him from everywhere' (Eunapius, *VPh* 5.1.4). Iamblichus welcomed them to a communal life where school discipline went hand in hand with the intimacy of the philosophical circle:

> Occasionally he worshipped the divine alone, apart from his disciples and followers. But most of his time he spent with his disciples; leading an undemanding and old-fashioned way of life, he was full of charm and filled them as with nectar as they drank their wine and conversed. (Eunapius, *VPh* 5.1.4)

As a spiritual great-grandson of Iamblichus and an important representative of the hagiographical literature of his day, Eunapius paints in vivid colours the ambience of the micro-society which developed around the master of Apamea, with its solemnities and diversions, its miracles and its hard scholastic discipline. The academic timetable and the ritual routine, which consisted of prayer, sacrifice and contemplation, were interspersed with periods of recreation, involving promenades in the estates of Iamblichus and excursions to holy places, in the course of which the master was pressed to give practical demonstrations of the ways in which the true philosopher is at one with the universe by performing miracles. Pupils spent several years at Apamea before becoming fully-fledged philosophers, holy men and administrators who would leave their mark on the political and intellectual life of the empire. What did these people learn in Apamea, what did they go out to preach to the world?

The institutional framework into which Iamblichus poured his teaching was a kind of boarding school where the students followed a *modus vivendi* that was to shape them for the rest of their life. Foremost among their daily activities was of course attendance at classes. The process of learning consisted in the

9. Libanius, *Or.* 52.21 and *Ep.* 1389.

reading of a given text and its formal exegesis by the teacher, rather than the free dialogue that had been the case in ancient times. In this respect Iamblichus did not innovate; he systematized and codified a technique of teaching which consisted in the continuous commentary on a given text – a technique already known to his forebears and especially to Plotinus' pupil, Porphyry.[10] The real contrast however is between Iamblichus' and Plotinus' methodology, about which we know a great deal.

In order to solve a philosophical problem (*aporia*) set by himself, or to answer a question of a moral or a metaphysical nature, or to elucidate a point of logic, Plotinus drew liberally and indiscriminately on a very large pool of ancient and *contemporary* works.[11] Moreover,

> he did not just speak straight out of whatever work he had chosen to read, but took a distinctive personal line in his consideration, and brought the spirit of Ammonius [his Alexandrian teacher] to bear on the investigations in hand. He quickly absorbed what was read, and would give the meaning of some profound subject of study in a few words and pass on. (Porphyry, *VPl* 14.14-17)

In order to buttress an argument or build a case, Plotinus drew critically on the entirety of the philosophical tradition at his disposal, subjecting his choice of passages to the requirements of an aporetic method of teaching; thus in his classes he did not follow a prescribed syllabus or a predetermined plan, nor did he set any criteria of selection and interpretation of his sources for others to follow. Porphyry even complained that when he first arrived in Plotinus' classroom in 263 (after Plotinus had been teaching in Rome for nearly two decades), the atmosphere was 'full of disorder' (ἀταξίας πλήρης).

To this liberal and *ad hoc* way of dealing with the heritage of the past, Iamblichus responded by creating a detailed curriculum of studies based on a great dogmatic corpus, which corresponded to an anagogic scale of practical and theoretical virtues.[12] The initial stages of this educational itinerary are delineated in a work entitled *On the Pythagorean Sect* or *The Collection of Pythagorean Doctrines*, which is symbolically divided into ten books, after the Pythagorean decad. As Dominic O'Meara has shown in an important study, what Iamblichus achieved through this programmatic text was to pythagorize Neo-

10. See Hadot, 'Commentaire philosophique'.
11. For examples of his method, see *VPl* 5.60-61, 13.9-17.
12. On the scale of virtues from Plotinus onwards, see Marinus, *VPr*, pp. LXIX-C.

platonism irreversibly: thus in Books III-X he redefined the quadrivium (consisting of the disciplines of mathematics, geometry, music and astronomy), making it an integral part of the curriculum of studies. More crucially, however, he established Pythagoras as the ideal guide on a slow and gradual process of initiation. Thus the first book of his *summa pythagorica* bears the telling title *On the Pythagorean Life* (rather than simply *Life of Pythagoras*, as is the case with a work by Porphyry).[13]

An Apollinian soul, sent down to earth in order to save humanity through the gift of education, the Iamblichan Pythagoras was born in Syria (rather than on Samos) and spent no less than thirty-six years in Egypt and in Babylon, imbibing the wisdom of the East, details which Iamblichus endowed with more than a tinge of autobiography. If the first Book of the Pythagorean decalogue sets the norms and the rules for an *imitatio Pythagorae*, the second, entitled *An Exhortation to Philosophy*, defines Pythagoreanism as the only true philosophy in positive as well as negative terms: using heresiological language and methods, Iamblichus decries Stoicism as 'a slippery and easily reversible way', while in his desire to endow Pythagoreanism with 'foundational texts', he lends his authority to pseudepigrapha by confirming the attribution of the *Golden Verses* (on which he seems to have produced a Commentary) to Pythagoras himself, and of a number of scientific treatises to Timaeus and Archytas.[14] Then follow the eight books which redefine the quadrivium and which, in one form or another, remained a permanent feature of the curriculum after Iamblichus. To sum up, in his Pythagorean Decalogue, Iamblichus outlined an educational itinerary firmly based on the study of ethics, physics and mathematics, and in so doing delineated a way to salvation, which he ascribed to Pythagoras and his pupils. But that was only the beginning.

Plotinus' use of Aristotle had been very selective, for the simple reason that when it came to important matters, Plotinus was no admirer of Aristotle. Thus, in a systematic treatise in three parts, he criticized his ontology at length and ultimately rejected it (*Enn.* VI.1; 2; 3 [42, 43, 44]). For this Plotinus was fiercely attacked by Iamblichus in a now lost work, *On the Categories*,[15] in which the Syrian philosopher among other arguments reiterated the Pythagorean reading of Aristotle by Pseudo-Archytas, as can be surmised from the text of an epigone, Simplicius.[16] What we can also deduce from later testimonies is that,

13. See O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 30-91.
14. On this process, see Macris, 'Jamblique'.
15. For an analysis of the evidence, see Taormina, *Jamblique*, 101-119.
16. Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* 302.5-308.3 Kalbfleisch.

in the Iamblichan curriculum of studies, the authority through which the students learned their logic was an Aristotle interpreted *à la platonicienne*. The study of Aristotle, however, like that of the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, which served as an introduction to the discipline of ethics, constituted a preparatory stage, the so-called προτέλεια or lesser mysteries, which led up to the study of Plato.

Before proceeding to deal with the Platonic canon formed by Iamblichus, we should attempt to specify the ways in which the introductory stages of his educational proposal became integrated into the curriculum of studies followed by the Platonic communities of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. In this connection three points emerge with some clarity:

1. The teaching alternated between logic, administered through Aristotle, and ethics, acquired through the study of the *Golden Verses* and/or of Epictetus' *Encheiridion*.

2. The quadrivium in its full extent does not seem to have constituted an obligatory item of the cursus of studies, as a result of the relative de-pythagorization of the curriculum after Iamblichus' demise.[17] A germane question concerns the place of the (restricted) quadrivium in the curriculum: was it taught before or after the Platonic courses? Several theories have been proposed in this respect, all resting on assumptions rather than hard evidence. Not wishing to segregate the components of Iamblichus' *Summa Pythagorica*, I would place (with John Dillon) the quadrivium in the preparatory stage of studies.

3. Iamblichus himself had produced either introductions or commentaries on the texts in his curriculum, often using as his source a pseudo-pythagorean intermediary rather than the original text itself. This point is of special importance to our argument for the light it sheds on the methodology of hermeneutics in late antiquity: commentaries begin to use earlier commentaries as their main source, and contact with the original text becomes increasingly indirect and derivative.

Plato the theologian

The study of the works mentioned so far served one sole purpose: it enabled the student to approach Plato, the truly divine master, whose συνανάγνωσις (guided study) coincides with the only way that can lead man towards spiritual perfection. For this reason, unlike the 'undergraduate curriculum' which of-

17. See O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 211-213.

fered several – often alternative – courses, graduate studies, consisting of two cycles, were strictly Platonic. The first cycle, as defined by Iamblichus and followed with religious devotion by all his successors, was introduced with the *Life* of the paradigmatic saint who gave his name to the community. Like Pythagoras, Plato is divine and Apollinian. According to the authorized biography, his educational itinerary began in Athens under the direction of Socrates and continued in Magna Graecia, where he studied with the leading representatives of the Pythagorean tradition as well as with the most prominent students of Parmenides. Several of the dialogues which form the backbone of the Iamblichan canon – the *Timaeus*, the *Cratylus*, the *Parmenides*[18] – should be seen as tokens and grateful mementos of this apprenticeship. But the main lesson that Plato drew from his sojourn in Southern Italy was the realization that Pythagorean philosophy had its origin in Egypt. Accordingly, he went to sit at the feet of the Egyptian priests from whom he acquired the sciences of geometry and theurgy (ἱερατική). Finally, acting on the model of Pythagoras (and one may add of Iamblichus himself), Plato rounded off his education in Phoenicia where the Magi introduced him to the teaching of Zoroaster.[19]

This *Life*, which we owe to a sixth-century professor, inaugurates the Iamblichan canon of twelve Platonic dialogues divided into two cycles. The first cycle is made up of ten dialogues hierarchically arranged in four groups, which follow the scale of virtues. According to this classification the *First Alcibiades*, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo* are the ethical dialogues, followed by the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, from which the student learned his logic; immediately after come the physical treatises – the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* – to be succeeded by the theological dialogues consisting of the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium* and finally the *Philebus*. The second cycle comprised two dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, which summarize all knowledge by revealing to the initiate the respective secrets of the physical and the metaphysical world. It is worth mentioning that this division into two groups seems to obey specific rules of mystical arithmology, the group of the ten dialogues evoking the Pythagorean decad and that of the two 'perfect' ones corresponding to the primordial dyad.[20]

When reviewing this canon, one is struck by two things: (1) the dialogues chosen by Iamblichus are those in which myth is pre-eminent, while the influence of the Pythagorean/Eleatic masters is more prominent than that of Socra-

18. Anonymous, *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon* (Westerink), 4.1-9.
19. Anonymous, *Prolégomènes*, 4.9-14.
20. For the Platonic canon, see Anonymous, *Prolégomènes*, 26.23-44.

tes, and (2) the *Republic* and the *Laws* are absent from the study list, presumably because of their great length: for, as the surviving evidence reveals, these two works certainly formed part of the libraries of the Neoplatonic schools and they were abundantly quoted by the members of the community.

To this immutable order of reading the 'canonic dialogues' (the so-called τάξις) there corresponds a hermeneutical method fixed once and for all by Iamblichus, according to which each dialogue has a single objective or purpose (σκοπός), to be pursued through the systematic action of the continuous commentary. And, as is shown by the surviving commentaries – both those which were written by the successors of Iamblichus themselves and those compiled from the notes taken by students during lectures (ἀπὸ φωνῆς) – Iamblichus' rules of interpretation were piously observed well into the sixth century. Indeed, in the very few cases when someone dared assign to one of the prescribed dialogues a different *skopos* from the one fixed by the Apamean master, he was immediately decried as a heretic by the other members of the textual community. In this respect, the very last successor of the Platonic Academy, Damascius, preserves two splendid anecdotes in connection with one of his predecessors and former masters, Marinus. The other person involved in the stories is the Alexandrian Isidore, a fellow-student of Marinus and a teacher of Damascius himself:

> During Isidore's second visit to Athens after the death of their common master, Marinus showed him a prolix commentary that he had composed on Plato's *Philebus*, urging him to read it critically in order to tell him whether he should publish the book. Isidore read it carefully and, concealing nothing of what he thought, but at the same time not uttering a single unseemly word, he merely said that the master's commentary on the dialogue was quite sufficient. Marinus understood his meaning and immediately burned the book. (Damascius, *Philosophical history* [*Phil. hist.*] fr. 38A Athanassiadi)

Marinus later produced a commentary on the quintessentially theological dialogue – the *Parmenides* – in which he argued, against the *skopos* set once and for all by Iamblichus, that 'the dialogue did not deal with gods but with species'. When he made a point of sending a letter to Isidore detailing his case, the latter

> responded proving by an infinity of arguments that the more divine interpretation of the dialogue is the most truthful. And indeed, had the book not yet been published, Marinus would have immediately destroyed that one as well; probably though, he was also prevented from doing so by

> what was seen in a dream, for Proclus had said that he once dreamed that Marinus would write a commentary on the *Parmenides*. (Damascius, *Phil. hist.* fr. 97J)

In the atmosphere of intellectual terrorism which now prevailed among the people of the Book, Marinus found himself caught between the strictures of orthodoxy and faith in his master's prophetic gift, and he opted for the latter.

The gods and the theologians: the Chaldaean Oracles and the Orphic Hymns

Iamblichus seems to have laid out and justified his Platonic curriculum in a theoretical work entitled *Platonic Theology*. Yet, treading in the footsteps of Numenius among others, he also declared that the study of Plato does no more than prepare the soul for the last stage of the mystic vision (ἐποπτεία), dispensed by the theologians and by the gods. An ancient and a recent revelation, the Orphic Hymns and the Chaldaean Oracles were the two holy books which crowned the Iamblichan curriculum, and whose study was reserved solely for the happy few.[21] Consisting for the most part of Hellenistic pseudepigrapha legitimized by Iamblichus, the Orphic scriptures had been subsumed into the Platonic theology through the fabrication of a spiritual genealogy which made Plato descend from Aglaophamus through Pythagoras. As Proclus declared:

> The whole of Greek theology is an offspring of the Orphic mysteries; first Pythagoras was taught the divine mysteries by Aglaophamus, and then Plato obtained perfect knowledge of them from the Pythaorean and Orphic texts. (Proclus, *Theologia platonica* 1.5, pp. 25.26-26.4 Saffrey, Westerink)[22]

21. Cf. Marinus, *VPr* 26.3-10 (concerning Proclus and Domninus); Damascius, *Phil. hist.* fr. 145B (about Hegias). Damascius informs us (*Phil. hist.* fr. 85A) that the philosopher Asclepiodotus, who had the reputation of a universal genius, was deficient 'in the field of higher wisdom – the Orphic and Chaldaean lore which transcends philosophical common sense'.
22. Cf. Iamblichus, *De vita pythagorica* 146 Deubner, Klein; and *In Tim.* fr. 74 Dillon.

That the Orphic literature, in its Pythagorean and Platonic interpretation, represented the very essence of Greek theology had already been explained by Proclus' master and predecessor as head of the Academy, Syrianus: in a now lost work entitled *On the Theology of Orpheus*, he seems to have reiterated Iamblichus' thesis on the authenticity of the Orphic hymns and to have set out the rules for their reading. More importantly, however, Syrianus produced a major programmatic treatise on the *Agreement of Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato with the Oracles*,[23] which set out with extreme clarity the interconnections between the many components of the Platonic cursus, together with the hierarchical order of each text within the ideal library of the religious community.

Yet, however high the position of the Orphic texts may have been in Platonic theology, they did not crown it: the topmost peak was represented by the direct revelation of the gods themselves – the θεοπαράδοτα λόγια, the so-called Chaldaean Oracles, which were transmitted to mankind many centuries after the song of Orpheus. As one reads the Neoplatonists, one realizes that the medium through which the gods communicated their message – Julian the Theurgist – was to them the ultimate prophet whose message 'set the seal' on all revelation, just as Jesus, Mani and Muhammad did for their own adepts. Consequently, with the Chaldaean revelation the prophetic cycle was closed: after the Theurgist there could be no more prophets, only commentators, and this is precisely the role that Iamblichus assigned to himself and bequeathed to his successors.

But commentators on what? Only on the canon? How about all that had preceded and followed it? What was to be done with an age-old, still evolving culture in the same language as the canon, which was also the *lingua franca* of the civilized world? It had to be integrated. But to what extent and according to what criterion? Following guidelines suggested by Iamblichus, his successors used the criterion of divine revelation as they divided their literary heritage into two categories, sacred and profane, endorsing the first as god-sent and rejecting the latter as deleterious to humanity. So far as we can judge from surviving evidence, this initiative went far beyond that of Iamblichus, who had viewed all known literature in a positive spirit; to quote the metaphor used by one of his disciples in this connection, the Syrian philosopher brought together all of Greek literature into one systematic and harmonious structure, as one tunes a musical instrument.[24] As he built his ideal library, Iamblichus concen-

23. Suda s.v. Σ 1662, IV, 479.1-2.
24. Ps.-Julian, *Ep.* 187, 405d Bidez, Cumont.

trated on selecting the items which suited his project rather than on condemning what was of no use to him. His followers, on the other hand, laid as much – if not more – emphasis on what should be expunged than on what should be retained.[25]

The crucial initiative in this respect comes from the Emperor Julian, a man who, in his own words, was 'mad about Iamblichus as a philosopher and [his own] namesake as a theosophist' (*Ep.* 12). Accordingly, he took it upon himself to judge and anoint all Greek literature in the light of these two authorities. To his mind, the only philosophers to be read were 'those who, in their teaching, chose the gods as their guides – like Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the school of Chrysippus and Zeno'. In an encyclical letter addressed to his clergy in his capacity as Pontifex Maximus, in which he defined in positive terms the authorized readings or *litterae licitae*, Julian went on to provide an *index librorum prohibitorum* which included not only individual works and authors, but even whole literary genres – the Old Comedy and the Novel – and entire philosophical traditions, such as Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism.[26] Moreover, as the absolute ruler of an oecumenical state, Julian felt that it was incumbent upon him to regulate education at all levels, starting from the most elementary stage, in which grammar was taught through the intermediary of rhetorical and poetical texts.

> Was it not the gods who revealed all their learning to Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Isocrates and Lysias? Did they not recognize themselves as consecrated, some to Hermes, others to the Muses?

asked Julian in his famous law of 362 by which he prohibited the Christian teachers from passing on the wisdom that the gods had revealed to the Greek poets, orators and historians, while encouraging Christian children to study the scriptures of Hellenism under proper guidance (*Ep.* 61, 423a).

The question which springs to mind at this point is the following: had Iamblichus never existed, would Julian have been able to articulate the polarity sacred-profane in as unambiguous (and aggressive) terms as he did? On the strength of Julian's own confession, one is forced to answer this question in the negative. The inspiration behind all his theoretical and practical endeavours

25. Behind this censorious attitude may be detected the concern for the formulation of an orthodoxy, as I attempt to show in my *Lutte*, *passim*.

26. Julian, *Ep.* 89b, 300c-301d.

was Iamblichus and nobody else.[27] Indeed, as much through his civil and religious legislation as through his exegetical and polemical work, Julian did no more than attempt to enforce the Iamblichan straitjacket and the logic which underlay it: first, he stated that in order to be integrated into the domain of the sacred all the products of the Greek literary tradition had to be subjected to a test of authenticity for which Iamblichus had provided the norms; second, only those items which passed the test successfully, thus acquiring the enviable status of *Praeparatio Chaldaïca*, could enter the library catalogue of the textual community that claimed descent from Plato. Subsequently Julian decreed that no outsider (indeed no infidel!) could possibly lay hands on these holy texts that had been revealed by divinity to the religious community of which he himself had consciously chosen to become a member, and of which by God's grace he was now the consecrated leader;[28] for, if they were not considered in a spirit of piety, these writings became defiled.

But the immense task of systematizing the sum total of learning, both Greek and barbarian, for the purpose of creating a unique sacred culture crowned by a book of revelation at the service of a people of the Book, had been conceived and carried out single-handedly by Iamblichus. More than that, Iamblichus was the man who supplied posterity with the rules for reading this literature. Indeed, if I had to pin one label on the Syrian philosopher, I would call him the precursor or even the inventor of scholasticism. Responding to the demands and the challenges of the hour, Iamblichus evolved a curriculum of studies and a methodology of teaching which remained unchanged well into medieval times.

The path trodden by the exegetes who followed in his footsteps is more familiar to us: using the rules of interpretation fixed by Iamblichus, they established a dogma, which gave rise to the notion of an orthodoxy in whose name a perpetual war began to be waged.[29] In this connection one should always remember that the Neoplatonists are no less responsible than other contemporary groups for the imposition of the tyranny of the Book, in whose name the burning of books took place.

27. Cf. in this respect Julian's dogmatic work *The Hymn to King Helios*, in which the imperial theologian admits to having drawn everything from Iamblichus (157d).
28. For the emperor's spiritual itinerary towards theocracy, see my *Julian, passim.*
29. Process described and analyzed in my 'Creation of orthodoxy' in Platonism'.

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VII

The Creation of Orthodoxy in Neoplatonism

He did not want to compel either himself or his pupils to pursue the invisible truth through reasoning alone, herded together by syllogisms along a single road like the blind whom one guides on the right path. But he always strove to persuade them by placing eyes in their soul, or rather cleansing those which were already there.

Nothing could be more appropriate for describing Miriam's teaching ethos than the above lines, in which Damascius pays tribute to the man who converted him to philosophy—the Alexandrian Isidore. And nothing could be more alien to her mentality than the notion of orthodoxy, which thrives on exclusion and suppression. For what follows, however, Miriam *is* responsible—albeit indirectly—for it was after an interview with her that in October 1972 Somerville offered me a place to do graduate work at Oxford. Wisely though, Miriam limited herself—as she often reminds me—to the role of moral tutor.

The Changing Scene: αἵρεσις: from Choice to Heresy

The Roman Empire was a pluralist world. Many cults, religions, theosophies, and philosophies mingled to create its spiritual landscape. What is more, these alternative ways to God were not mutually exclusive, but formed an organic synthesis. Were we to represent them schematically, they would appear as converging lines on a pyramid or a cone, the apex of which symbolizes the end of the search for truth. But if all roads led to the same goal, it was possible, and even desirable, for the individual seeker to stray away from his path, so long as he did not lose sight of his destination. Rather such detours were encouraged in a society where toleration of other creeds was not a passive principle, but an active drive which produced through cross-fertilization syncretistic structures of often vertiginous complexity.

I would like to thank Michael Frede who read an earlier version of this paper. I have made several changes on the basis of his comments. Thanks are also due to Paul Kalligas who read the final proofs and suggested amendments.

In this climate of spiritual promiscuity one religion, Judaism, stood apart in claiming a monopoly of God. Its self-righteousness was, however, not of the aggressive type, and proselytism of the religiously inferior 'nations' was not encouraged (Goodman 1994). As an offshoot of Judaism, Christianity also claimed exclusive knowledge of God, but at the same time recommended missionary activity as an obligation of the believer. Converting 'the nations' to the one true creed, and thus saving humanity from spiritual ignorance, was a duty for the good Christian.

The intolerance professed by the Christians as a principle of religious thinking and behaviour was not so much a new attitude in the multicultural world of the Mediterranean as a dynamic manifestation of latent trends. Yet however one defines it in sociological terms, spiritual intolerance led to tension and reaction: the Christians were persecuted, at first sporadically and from the mid-third century systematically,[1] while on the intellectual level their social and physical persecution was complemented by polemic. A climate of litigiousness and aggression spread, affecting society at large. Slowly but surely, intolerance permeated mentalities, and by the early fourth century it was not only the Christians who thought in terms of one single truth and, more importantly, of a universal way of reaching this truth.

These developments are faithfully mirrored in the word αἵρεσις and its changing fortunes during the centuries which lead from the 'open' world of the classical city-state to the 'oecumenicity' of the late Empire. From its broad classical meaning of 'choice' and 'election', the word αἵρεσις came in Hellenistic times to designate a system of philosophical principles and also the group of individuals professing such a school of thought and way of life—the Epicurean, the Stoic, or the Cynic, to mention only the most obvious. For pagan intellectuals this was still the prevailing meaning of the word in the fourth century, when their Christian contemporaries were already using it with the same semantic value that we now attach to the term 'heresy'. For the Christians, in philosophical and theological matters there was one truth only (the ὀρθὴ δόξα), to be pursued by one sole path.

The ὀρθὴ δόξα was not a totally novel concept for late antique men, but a notion with firm roots in Plato, for whom it signified a cognitive landmark reached through inspiration or by empirical means. Moreover, the path leading to the ὀρθὴ δόξα was an individual process of free enquiry and not a single public road imposed by dogma. To the Christian Fathers, by contrast, the one true faith could only be reached by one sole path. All other

[1] On the dynamic nature of anti-Christian persecution, see the dialogue between Sherwin-White (1952, 1964) and de Ste Croix (1954, 1963, 1964).

ways were deviations from the true road, indeed 'heresies'—the wrong kind of choice. This way of thinking was so well entrenched in the Christian mind that as soon as Christianity became a *religio licita*, oecumenical councils were convened under imperial patronage with the intention of defining dogma not only positively, by the formulation of a 'creed', but also apophatically, by the condemnation of heterodoxy.

The polarization between a pagan and a Christian use of language as reflected in the usage of the word αἵρεσις does not necessarily illustrate two conflicting ways of perceiving reality. People did not live in watertight compartments, though many of those engaged in sectarian fighting pretended, or even fooled themselves, that they did. As a comment on the above and by way of introduction to the main themes of this paper, one may quote a phrase of the Emperor Julian from a letter to the inhabitants of Bostra: talking of the religious policy of his predecessor, Julian refers in a condescending manner—almost with repugnance—to 'the so-called heretics', τῶν λεγομένων αἱρετικῶν (*Ep.* 114. 435d). The meaning of the participle τῶν λεγομένων in Julian's phrase is clear enough; it suggests that the author is forced to use a familiar word with the semantic hue that it has acquired in the jargon of people with whom he has nothing in common. One of the aims of this paper is to discover how alien the categories (in contradistinction to the actual words) 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' were to the pagan intellectuals of late antiquity as they revised their spiritual heritage. A second objective is to examine the extent to which the orthodox (or politically correct) understanding of the way to God was used by them as an instrument and a pretext for wielding worldly power.

The Origins of Neoplatonism

The Precursor: Numenius

For the historian of philosophy the founder of Neoplatonism is Plotinus, with the nebulous figure of Ammonius Saccas lurking in the background. But this is the dispassionate verdict of outsiders. To those who were themselves part of the movement, the pivotal figure of regenerated Platonism was indisputably Iamblichus. To answer the question 'why Iamblichus and not Plotinus?', one must concentrate on what the Neoplatonists considered fundamental in their thought-world, and try to detect its historical roots. Such a search might well leave us with the unexpected answer 'neither Plotinus nor Iamblichus!' But let us start at the beginning.

In the second century AD Numenius of Apamea made two large claims: that in order to understand Plato one must revert to Pythagoras, and

additionally that 'those initiations, dogmas and rituals that the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi and the Egyptians hold in accordance with Plato' should be seen as the touchstones of truth. Indeed that Plato's truth, which was lost to the Greeks, was preserved by 'the thriving nations' (*τὰ ἔθνη τὰ εὐδοκιμοῦντα*: fr. 1a).[2]

Numenius, whom his contemporaries and immediate successors invariably describe as a 'Pythagorean philosopher',[3] is a mysterious figure, as too little of what he has produced survives; yet the impression created by the fragments of his works, that he was a boldly revisionist thinker, is corroborated by a cluster of outward testimonies. His connection with the new revelation of the age—the Chaldaean Oracles—though obscure, is beyond doubt; indeed for E. R. Dodds, Numenius constitutes the missing link between the Oracles and Porphyry (1960: 11).[4] More importantly, his influence on Plotinus was felt to be so great that the latter had to be formally defended against the accusation of plagiarism (Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 17.1). And though on the evidence of what survives it is not possible to assess Plotinus' debt to Numenius, it is nevertheless clear that the two men shared a breadth of vision transcending scholastic boundaries and a comparable revisionist insight into Plato's thought which served them as the basis for the formulation of revolutionary theories and methodologies.[5] Porphyry

[2] It must be pointed out that the dependence of Plato on Pythagoras had already been put forward, and in rather aggressive terms, by Moderatus of Gades.

[3] Among others Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Nemesius, and Calcidius. Cf. Dodds 1960: 11, who calls him 'a Pythagorean rather than a Middle Platonist'. On the psychology and theology of Numenius, Frede 1987: 1034–75.

[4] This judgement was later modified by Dodds 1961: 271. For the more balanced view that 'both the Oracles and Numenius are influenced by the same currents of thought, Pythagorean, Gnostic and Hermetic', Dillon 1977: 364, cf. 393. My recent involvement with the Chaldaean Oracles leads me to the hypothesis that Julian the Theurgist, to whom we owe the poem, and his father, Julian the Chaldaean, who was instrumental in the editing of the divine revelation, belonged to a priestly caste linked with the temple of Bel at Apamea. Both men must have moved in the circle of Numenius, influencing him and at the same time taking in his own ideas. And it was this mutual and long-term give and take that gave shape to both the Chaldaean revelation and the system of Numenius, which was born in conjunction with the Oracles and developed in close interrelation with them.

[5] As E. R. Dodds put it epigrammatically in the discussion following his paper: 'The ghost of Numenius haunted Plotinus all his life because they were the same unsettled and in the end insoluble problems which both men attempted to deal with' (1960: 59). Significant evidence linking the two men is provided by their ardent admirer, the literal-minded Amelius, who, having collected and copied out all of Numenius' works, learned almost all of them by heart, while in the course of the twenty-four years that he spent at Plotinus' feet, he produced no less than a hundred books of notes based on the master's seminars (Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 3. 38 ff.; cf. 14. 13 for Plotinus' use of Numenius' works). Then, as he saw his place as favourite pupil and spokesman for the circle devolve to the newly arrived Porphyry, Amelius left Rome for Apamea where he spent the rest of his days, probably as head of a circle which propagated the doctrines of Numenius. The formation of a 'Numenian' circle by Amelius, which may in due

too, as it now emerges from recent research, was crucially influenced by Numenius before becoming himself an inspiration to later Platonists both pagan and Christian (P. Hadot 1996; Tardieu 1996), a fact fully realized by Eusebius, who not only singled out Numenius as a dangerously original theologian, but, following Origen, identified him with the critical turning-point in the history of Platonism.[6]

As the self-appointed arbiter of Plato's thought, Numenius denounced the *diadoche* (succession) of Plato as spurious and called for a new beginning. He then defined Platonic orthodoxy by mustering criteria of selection consisting in methodologies both of inclusion and of exclusion. To this end he rewrote the history of the school as doctrine and prosopography, accepting as genuinely Platonic much of the contemporary 'Oriental wisdom', while charging every single diadoch with the betrayal of the Platonic dogmas.[7] A first attempt at defining Platonic orthodoxy!

A New Beginning: Iamblichus of Apamea

The common spring from which Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Porphyry drank, the elusive Numenius saw himself, and was seen by his immediate successors, as a landmark in the spiritual history of the age; but, as is often the case with exceptionally original thinkers, a screen was raised between himself and posterity: his innovations had to be digested by the following generation and spelt out to the world according to the understanding of individual interpreters. Paramount among these was Iamblichus, the boundaries of whose originality in defining Platonism and setting out the norms by which it can be assessed clearly lie in Numenian terrain. Yet, while suspecting the magnitude of his debt to his Apamean predecessor, all we can do today is concentrate on the concept of orthodoxy that Iamblichus himself created, and go on to study its transfiguration at the hands of his epigoni who used it as a means of wielding social and spiritual power.

Already in the consciousness of his contemporaries Iamblichus was a major religious reformer, endowed with all the formal and essential characteristics of a prophet, 'as if appointed for the salvation of the entire human

course have been instrumental in attracting Iamblichus to Apamea, is corroborated by the title of one of Iamblichus' works addressed *πρὸς τοὺς ἀμφὶ Ἀμέλιον καὶ Νουμήνιον* (Proclus, *In Tim.* 2. 277. 28–30); for Amelius' circle, cf. Syrianus, who seems to dislike him, finding him merely *ἐλλογιμώτατον* (*In Met. CAG* vi: Kroll 1902: 119. 14 and 147. 6: *τοιαῦτα γὰρ οἱ περὶ Ἀμέλιον τὸν Πλωτίνειον νεανιεύονται*). Cf. also Kalligas 1991, 115–16, 94, 109. For Amelius in general, Brisson 1987.

[6] *Praep. Ev.* 11. 9. 8, 11. 17. 11, 14. 4. 16; Origen *CC* 5. 57, 1. 15.

[7] The work, which survives in fragmentary form (frs. 24–8), was entitled *On the Dissension of the Academics from Plato.*

race' (Ps.-Jul. *Ep.* 187. 406c). An acute sense of cosmic divinity and a sure instinct for what was significant in tradition irrespective of origin enabled him to become an oecumenical exegete and a holy man of wide fame, who performed miracles if put under pressure but, more importantly and more durably, allied the newly structured Platonic and Pythagorean system of thought with the authority of revelation. Returning to his native Syria after long years of peregrination in Egypt and Italy, and significantly enough settling in Apamea, the Chalcidian Iamblichus injected Platonism with Hermetic wisdom, of which he seems to have been himself for many years an authoritative exegete (Athanassiadi 1995: 245–6), and carried out the immense task of sanctioning the recently revealed Chaldaean Oracles as the holy book of Hellenism.[8] Moreover, in tune with the spirit of the age, he established a canon of texts to be read in a specific order and manner: his selection of Platonic dialogues became, as it were, the Old Testament of Hellenism, with the Chaldaean Oracles functioning as the New Testament of the new faith. In all these respects Iamblichus distanced himself from Plotinus, who had ignored, or even attacked, recent theosophical wisdom, drawing his material for discussion exclusively from the store of Greek philosophical literature, where he did not limit his choice of texts to a set curriculum, but gleaned through the entire tradition in a manner that was perhaps too liberal and unprescriptive to be followed by disciples of lesser ability. More significantly, Plotinus did not believe in the primacy of grace. Following on the tradition of Greek rationalism, he founded his exegesis on minute argument and discussion (*V. Plot.* 13), presenting the mystic union not as a matter of divine intervention but as a result of intense personal effort in the intellectual and the moral spheres.[9]

Like Plotinus, on the other hand, Iamblichus was a systematic theologian and a gifted teacher. Yet if his immediate appeal proved so much stronger, this is only because he was also a hierophant who gave meaning, and even depth, to ritual (Athanassiadi 1993*a*: 119–20). Seeing himself as the pedagogue of mankind in spiritual matters,[10] he painstakingly mapped out a way—indeed, *the* way—to perfection, with all its practical and theoretical milestones. He thus established a canon of texts, which remained unaltered throughout late antiquity, and propagated the use of the structured com-

[8] For my hypothesis that the Chaldaean Oracles were produced, codified, and kept in the temple of Bel at Apamea, see Athanassiadi 1999*b*: 153–6. Iamblichus' *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles* numbered at least twenty-eight books (cf. Damascius, *De princ.* 2. 1).

[9] 'To set oneself above the mind, is to fall away from it.' Enn. II 9 ,9, 51–2.

[10] Cf. the expressions 'universal blessing of the Hellenes' and 'saviour of humanity as a whole' used by one of Iamblichus' pupils on his account: Ps.-Jul., *Epp.* 187. 406e and 181. 449b respectively.

mentary as the only method of research and teaching for that curriculum. At the same time, using Pythagorean numerical symbolism, he divided the path to God into ten stages, which are mirrored with exemplary clarity in the ten books of his substantially extant *Συναγωγὴ τῶν Πυθαγορείων Δογμάτων* (O'Meara 1989: 30–105).

Pupils flocked to 'the sacred hearth' of Apamea from all over the Mediterranean world (Ps.-Jul. *Ep.* 187. 405d) to share a life which combined in a traditional manner the notions of *παιδεία* and *παιδιά*—one where pleasure went hand in hand with the pursuit of wisdom and the practice of a pious routine.[11] The incidental information provided by Eunapius on the circle's daily activities, when read against the background of Iamblichus' *Pythagorean Life*, suggests an atmosphere of philosophical and human intimacy, which seems consciously to reproduce Pythagorean models. Master and pupils lived together. They discussed philosophical issues formally, but also at their evening gatherings, while drinking their wine; they took long walks to holy sites in the Syrian countryside, and also more secular excursions to bathing stations. The pupils were teased by Iamblichus' slaves for their belief that their teacher was divine and they in their turn pestered the master for miracles and other tokens of his sanctity. The surviving letters of Iamblichus to his friends and pupils, and the correspondence of a pupil—a certain Julian who seems to have been a high official at Licinius' court—allow us further insights into the ambience of the circle, the diversity of its concerns, and the dominant ideology which animated it.[12] In one of his addresses to his beloved master, Julian puts his finger on a point of cardinal importance: Iamblichus' systematic sanctification of Greek letters. 'Just as in a lyre the harmonious combination of various notes achieves musical perfection, in the same way you have succeeded in uniting not just Pindar or Democritus or the most ancient Orpheus, *but the entirety of that Hellenic spirit which is on record as having reached the very summit of philosophy*' (Ps.-Jul. *Ep.* 187. 405d).

Here we have the first clear formulation of what the Emperor Julian was to express in negative terms in his edict on education and his pastoral letters: that Greek culture as defined by Iamblichus was sacred, that what he had left out was profane, despite its antiquity and other philosophical

[11] A detail worth noting in this connection is that Iamblichus celebrated Pleasure as a goddess: Damascius, *In Phil.* 19. 5. For the traditional mode, cf. the expression of Iamblichus' pupil Julian who describes the circle as being *τοῦ παλαιοῦ κόμματος* (*Ep.* 187. 406d).

[12] For the identification of Julian, T. D. Barnes 1978: 99–106. I find the newly advanced hypothesis by Vanderspoel (1999) that the epistolographer may be the maternal grandfather of the Emperor Julian, Julius Julianus, lacking in probability.

credentials, whereas what he had sanctioned from even the most recent 'wisdom of the Barbarians' represented the highest form of spirituality. As presented by Iamblichus, the ingredients of the new paganism were a set number of texts, a given hermeneutic methodology, and a ritual framework. Its authorized language was Greek, while the vehicle through which its message would reach the world was the circle of disciples who gathered around the Exegete of the divine mysteries. The need for a 'metropolitan' theology expressed only in Greek was firmly launched by Iamblichus, and in the following centuries every effort was made to integrate all local gods, cults, and myths in a systematic thought-world which bore the formal name of *Ἑλληνισμός*, in response and open challenge to the term *Χριστιανισμός*.

The Rift

Both during Iamblichus' own lifetime and after his death, some of his spiritual heirs went away to wield worldly power,[13] while others embraced an academic career in the traditional centres of learning of the Eastern Mediterranean (Eunapius *V. Phil.* 6. 2. 1). As holy men and scholars they spread the teaching of their master widely, each according to the way in which he had imbibed it. Thus the Cappadocian Aedesius, who was recognized as Iamblichus' direct successor (6. 4. 1), seems to have inherited, together with his master's breadth of outlook, his qualities as an affable man, a cool-headed philosopher, and a diviner in intimate contact with the cosmic powers (6. 4. 5; 9. 2; 4. 1–4). Unfortunately, so full and balanced an attitude was not displayed in the generation that followed and, of the four most prominent pupils of Aedesius, Eusebius and Priscus were noted for their combative rationalism, whereas Maximus and Chrysanthius became famous as manipulators of the divine hierarchy (7. 2. 1), not least through their connection with the Emperor Julian.

The rift thus occurred within a few years of Iamblichus' death, but what is of interest for present purposes is that, to judge from the available evidence, the rationalists did not claim descent from Iamblichus. Another figure from the recent past, Theodore of Asine, emerges as their mentor. His followers, 'the Theodoreans', disparaged Iamblichus as an ambitious showman, rejected the authority of the Chaldaean Oracles, and equated philosophical research with dialectics (Julian, *Ep.* 12). Indeed Priscus, whom Julian beseeches to shut his ears against the propaganda of 'the

[13] An extreme case is that of Iamblichus' favourite pupil, the Apamean Sopater, who, after becoming Constantine's mentor, fell from grace as a result of court machinations, and paid with his life for the influence that he had exerted upon the emperor: Eunapius, *V. Phil.* 6. 2.

Theodoreans', denigrated Aedesius to his face as a 'traitor' to philosophy (*V. Phil.* 8. 1. 9).[14]

But the key figure in this debate in more than one respect is the Emperor Julian; for he seems to have both precipitated and exacerbated developments which were latent in Neoplatonism before his appearance at Pergamon in 351. No sooner had he been introduced to the two methodologies than he knew where his heart lay. This moment is caught in a famous exchange between master and pupil: when the sober Eusebius, who, with reference to Maximus of Ephesos, warns Julian against 'the tricks and impostures of conjurers which deceive and beguile the senses', indeed against 'madmen who are led astray by material powers' (7. 2. 3), Julian retorts with sarcasm: 'I am off! Stick to your books; as for me, you have shown me the man I was looking for!' (7. 2. 12). Converted to Maximus' 'violent way' of dealing with the supernatural,[15] the impulsive and uncompromising Julian used word and action in his campaign for orthodoxy. In fact he stands as the first clear landmark in Hellenism of a choice to be made between the one right way and numerous blind alleys.

From his position as worldly and spiritual leader of the Roman Empire—at once *basileus* and *pontifex maximus*—Julian defined the content of Hellenism, a term that he did not coin but to which he gave new weight and universal currency (Athanassiadi 1992). To disseminate his idea of Hellenism as the indivisible spiritual, cultural, and political force which would cement the oecumenical state that he now ruled by God's grace, Julian had recourse to all the practical and intellectual weapons at his disposal: formal legislation, encyclical letters to the priesthood of which he was the hierarchical chief, systematic polemic, and finally dogmatic or canonical writings which reflect his own view of Iamblichanism. As he confessed, 'I am mad (*μέμηνα*) about Iamblichus in philosophy and my namesake in theosophy' (*Ep.* 12).[16]

If the extent to which Iamblichus would have recognized his own teaching in Julian's Hellenism is a matter for speculation, what is important for us at this stage of the argument is that, to Julian's mind, his programme was

[14] On the rift between the two schools of paganism, see my analysis (with new prosopographical data) 1991: 271–8.

[15] To Chrysanthius, who at the sight of inauspicious signs is reluctant to go along with helping Julian in his religious campaign, Maximus puts across as a principle that one must compel the divine nature until it bends towards the servant (*ἐκβιάζεσθαι τὴν τοῦ θείου φύσιν ἄχρις ἂν ἐπικλίνῃ πρὸς τὸν θεραπεύοντα*: 7. 3. 12).

[16] The namesake is Julian the Theurgist, to whom the authorship of the Chaldaean Oracles was attributed. In his *Hymn to King Helios* Julian admits that his treatment is entirely based on Iamblichus (150d), an acknowledgement that he makes a point of reiterating at the end of the oration (157d).

the very embodiment of Iamblichus' spirit. His educational absolutism, as expounded in his edict on education which prohibited the Christians from teaching what they did not consider holy—that is, the entirety of Greek letters—his definitive banishing of the Epicureans and the Sceptics from the province of Greek letters, and finally his denunciation of latter-day Cynics as heretics are the first indications of a new conception of intellectual protectionism that we do not find fully articulated before the era of Justinian.[17]

Back in the time of Julian the battle between rationalists and visionaries was still undecided, though the balance was already tilting towards the latter. The dogma of the agreement of Plato with Aristotle enunciated by Ammonius Saccas (Hierocles ap. Photius, *Bibl.* Cod. 214. 172a) and endorsed by Iamblichus had not yet acquired universal value, and for the best part of the fourth century the influential and long-lived Themistius continued commenting on Aristotle in a distinctly untheological manner, and advising Court and Senate on political ideology and social behaviour. As well as old-fashioned Aristotelians, the Cynics and the Epicureans led a campaign against oracles, which explains the rage with which Julian attacks them (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4. 3. 14; Julian *Ep.* 89b. 301b–c). By the end of the fourth century, however, the direction in which Greek philosophy was to move had been settled. After a long interval of dissociation from Plato, Athens emerged as the authorized seat of Platonic studies,[18] yet this time the road passed through Apamea.[19] The nebulous figure of the Eleusinian hierophant Nestorius with his well-attested Chaldaean connection and the clear-cut figure of his son, the Platonic diadoch Plutarch, were the men who set the firm bases for the perpetuation of the Iamblichan philosophical model in Athens, not just as theory but also as a practical way of life.[20]

Invariably described as 'divine', Iamblichus became the one unchallengeable authority, the sole guide on the path to philosophical and spiritual perfection for all the official exegetes who flourished in Athens and

[17] Iamblichus, in the tradition of Numenius and Amelius, was a tolerant man.

[18] There was never an Alexandrian school of Neoplatonism as such: see I. Hadot 1978.

[19] Justifiably Dillon calls the Athenian school of the 2nd cent. AD 'an empty name' (1977: 265). And the fate of Longinus, who dominated the Athenian scene in the middle of the 3rd cent., is a perfect example of the *damnatio memoriae* suffered by those who did not adopt 'the correct approach' to Plato. Remembered simply as a 'living library and walking museum' (*V. Phil.* 4. 1. 3), he was totally ignored by the genealogists of the Platonic succession (cf. Hierocles ap. Photius, *Bibl.* Cod. 214, 173a ad fin.), for whom Plotinus' aphorism 'Longinus is a scholar but certainly not a philosopher!' (Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 14. 19–20) provided the definitive verdict.

[20] On the identity of Nestorius, and his connection with Iamblichan Neoplatonism see Athanassiadi 1999*a*: 173, 355.

abroad until well into the sixth century. He was the norm of orthodoxy at a time when the struggle to define dogma had become the main task both of the Christian Church and of the Neoplatonic *Diadoche* (Athanassiadi 1993*b*: 11–12). Chiefly responsible for this development is the man who dominated the international philosophical scene for the best part of the fifth century, the Athenian successor Proclus, who seems to have played for Neoplatonism the combined roles of an Athanasius and a Cyril.

Proclus as Defender of Iamblichanism

The Succession

Proclus was in his early twenties when in 432 he arrived in Athens from Alexandria and was adopted by Plutarch and Syrianus as their spiritual offspring (Marinus, *V. Procli* 11). He went on to inherit the *diadoche* and, more importantly, shape and dominate the Neoplatonic scene at home and abroad. A compulsive writer, an exemplary saint, sage, and leader of the pagan community, as he emerges from Marinus' biography and Damascius' *Philosophical History*, Proclus had no difficulty, through his daily pious routine, systematic teaching, and voluminous writings, in propagating his own view of Iamblichan Platonism as the authorized version.

Proclus died in 485 at the age of 75. In the last five years of his life he was progressively struck by senility, yet by that time he was such a venerable figure that not only did he keep his post as diadoch, but he was actively involved in the complicated (and often vicious) struggle for the succession. This fascinating contest is reported in all its recondite detail by the last holder of Plato's chair; in his *Philosophical History* Damascius tells us that, 'fearing that the golden chain of Plato might forsake Athens' (fr. 98e), Proclus drew up a list of successors, choosing his candidates among a chorus of pure Platonists (τῷ ἀκηράτῳ χορῷ fr. 152). Though we have no sure way of reconstructing this list in its entirety, Damascius provides sufficient evidence as regards both the personalities participating in it and the criteria of their selection.

The heir apparent had for many years been Zenodotus, 'the only man thought worthy of the nickname "the darling of Proclus"' (fr. 99b). Though certainly of the orthodox persuasion (since we find him in the early 490s teaching Damascius theoretical philosophy),[21] Zenodotus seems not to have been unimaginative enough to be selected to carry the torch upon

[21] Photius, *Bibl.* Cod. 181 and Athanassiadi 1999*a*: 43–4 and 341 with nn. for clarification.

Proclus' death. This task fell on Marinus, a convert to Hellenism, who 'through hard work and tireless effort, . . . succeeded in burying with his own name the reputations of many people more gifted and also older than himself' (fr. 97c). A literal-minded, fearful and malleable man, with fragile health and minimal self-respect (frs. 38a, 97j), Marinus was chosen by Proclus to write his authorized biography, indeed to personalize and simplify through a neatly structured hagiographical text the norms of scholarship and sanctity valid in the school.[21a]

But there were others too: the ingenious Asclepiodotus, and the eccentric Isidore. The first, to whom Proclus had dedicated his commentary on the quintessentially theological Neoplatonic dialogue, the *Parmenides*, was, according to Damascius (fr. 80), 'the sharpest and most learned of all his contemporaries', yet his final verdict on him is that he was of 'uneven intelligence, especially when it came to divine matters—the invisible and intelligible essence of Plato's lofty thought' (fr. 85a). For this reason, despite the enormous and many-sided pressure that he exerted on Proclus, not least through his influential father-in-law (Athanassiadi 1999*a*: Appendix II: 348–9), Asclepiodotus was not included in the final list.

Isidore, on the other hand was the opposite of Asclepiodotus, as Damascius notes in a passage of clear polemical intent:

> His senses were moderately acute, merely serving his needs; and not only the senses, but also the wax mould which is the imagination did not surpass the average as regards its memory nor was it altogether free of forgetfulness. For it seems that God wanted to show that he was a soul rather than a combination of soul and body, and that he had not deposited philosophy in this combination but had established it in the soul alone. (*PH* fr. 14)[22]

Unlike the innovative Asclepiodotus, Isidore was a staunch defender of the Iamblichan view of the history of philosophy.

> Among the ancient philosophers [Isidore] worshipped as divine Pythagoras and Plato [considering them] to be among those winged souls who dwell in the supra-celestial regions, in the plain of Truth, in the meadow of divine forms. But after Plato he particularly devoted himself to Iamblichus and his friends and adepts, the best of whom he claimed was his own fellow citizen Syrianus, the teacher of Proclus. (fr. 34d)

[21a] See now the translation and commentary by Edwards 2000; the new Budé edition (H.-D. Saffrey and A.-Ph. Segonds, Paris, 2001) has little of substance to add.

[22] What follows is an open attack on Asclepiodotus: 'I have indeed chanced upon some who are outwardly splendid philosophers in their rich memory of a multitude of theories; in the shrewd flexibility of their countless syllogisms; in the constant power of their extraordinary perceptiveness. Yet within they are poor in matters of the soul and destitute of true knowledge.'

This insistence on what constitutes Neoplatonic orthodoxy—clearly in the face of opposition—must have been one of the main reasons for which Proclus looked upon Isidore as a worthy successor.

By the early 480s, however, when Proclus was putting pressure on him to accept the succession, Isidore was already an acclaimed teacher in Alexandria. His mentor, as it appears from Damascius' account, was not so much Proclus as the holy Sarapio, an urban hermit who spent his days in absolute solitude 'meditating in silence. A seeker of the Truth and a man with a theoretical cast of mind, he could not bear to occupy himself with the technicalities of philosophy, but immersed himself in those vigorous concepts which fill one with God' (fr. 111). Unlike Proclus, who emerges as a great master of analytical thinking, Sarapio had a wholly negative view of learning that he bequeathed, alongside his 'two or three books' (the Orphica), to Isidore and through him to Damascius (fr. 111).[23]

It may indeed be argued that in his obstinate refusal to assume the Platonic succession, or even be included in 'the list' (frs. 98c–d), Isidore was not solely led by his reluctance to shoulder the burdens of a post which combined academic and spiritual duties with a heavy administrative load. The example of his admired Sarapio may not have been unconnected with his choice to remain in Alexandria, where he already enjoyed universal fame at a time of reasonable security (fr. 106b). Conversely the hovering around the ailing Proclus of two tycoons—Asclepiodotus of Aphrodisias and Theagenes of Athens, respectively scheming on account of a son-in-law (the younger Asclepiodotus) and a son (Hegias)—must have confirmed Isidore in his decision to keep away. The climate in Athens in the early 480s was particularly insalubrious and Marinus who is lumped together with Isidore as a 'true philosopher' for the purpose of a contrast with Asclepiodotus 'who was equipped with all the things which give glamour to this life' (fr. 103b), had to leave Athens for a period 'as he suspected that plots were being directed against his very life' (fr. 101c). Finally Theagenes seems to have reached a compromise by persuading Proclus to include Hegias in the list of diadochoi (fr. 145); while the pressure brought by Proclus and Marinus on Isidore (frs. 98c, 103c) eventually bore fruit and he accepted, however reluctantly, 'the vote on the succession' (frs. 103e, 148c).

The Holy Life

Iamblichus' pupils shared a common life with their master. They took their meals together, drank their wine while discussing the mysteries of being, and made excursions to holy places thus allying pleasure with piety. They

[23] Cf. fr. 35a for 'the noisy babble of books'.

even insisted on communal prayer, denying their master any privacy (*V. Phil.* 5. 1–2). From the information that we possess there emerges the picture of an informal circle rather than a school, bathing in an ambience of mild asceticism. Proclus' establishment, on the other hand, had more the air of an institution than that of a circle, where the rules of an ascetic life were enforced by a superintendent who taught at the Academy alongside with Proclus. This was Salustius, an old-fashioned Cynic who went round at all seasons barefooted (*PH* frs. 66b–c). No great lover of humanity, he was endowed with a sharp sense of the ridiculous and a sarcastic sense of humour which he used in order to make fun of self-important people, attack the wicked, and terrorize the not-so-bright (frs. 66a, 66b, 66e). When candidates applied for admission to the Academy, Salustius set them a series of tests, which to Damascius' mind were traps rather than a straightforward exam. Having had their nervous system and intellectual ability tested 'like gold in fire' (fr. 66f), once admitted to the Academy, the students went on to hear on a regular basis that they should give up philosophy as a calling beyond their abilities (frs. 66a, 66e).

On a more mundane note, 'Salustius went in and out of the students' dwelling place [and] saw that the cooking pots were absolutely immaculate and free from smoke, as if they were on display for sale in the market-place; for he laid particular stress on adhering to a diet of uncooked food for a long time' (fr. 66d). This culinary philosophy was in tune with Proclus' well-attested ascetic tastes and his insistence on a pure life.[24] Where the two men differed, however, was their attitude to good form. In genuine Cynic fashion, Salustius only cared about inner discipline, 'knew how to get to the core of things' (fr. 66a), and never missed an opportunity of decrying social convention even in its most innocent aspects. Proclus, on the other hand, was a great believer in decorous behaviour over the tiniest things. He was shocked, for instance, by Isidore's charming habit of reproducing the cries of birds, and even more by his 'imitation of sparrows and hens and other birds fluttering their wings as they rouse themselves for flight' (fr. 59f)—a performance that Isidore chose to give during the solemnity of the Chaldaean rituals. An even more telling illustration of Proclus' attachment to form concerns his order to the young Isidore to assume a coarse cloak as an indication that he had adhered to 'the better life' (fr. 59b). While attempting to argue that a taste for asceticism should normally follow rather than pre-

[24] The Antiochene Hilarius is not admitted by Proclus to read philosophy on account of 'his customary hedonism' (41ab); on Proclus' emphasis on virginity as a philosophical characteristic, Marinus, *V. Procli* and *PH* frs. 56, 97b, 59e, 59a, 59d. Marinus reports that the ascetic feats of the young Proclus were such that Plutarch and Syrianus feared for his life (*V. Procli* 12).

cede one's decision to embark on the study of philosophy (fr. 59d), Isidore—perhaps with some encouragement from Salustius too—ignored this injunction; and, when at some point in the 470s Salustius had a definitive quarrel with Proclus and left for Alexandria, Isidore went with him (fr. 60).[25]

An important item of Iamblichanism was the profession of cult and ritual. As 'the hierophant of the entire world', Proclus did not tire of expressing both in private and in public his religious fervour towards both the traditional Graeco-Roman gods and the ethnic deities of the Hellenistic *oecoumene*. He prayed every day at dawn and dusk, visited the shrines of the gods on appointed days, dedicated religious hymns to universal and regional gods alike, and revived local cults at home and abroad (*V. Procli* 15, 19, 29, 32, 36). In promoting pagan oecumenism through an intense and dangerous personal campaign, he certainly upheld the Iamblichan model of piety. His example was followed by both Isidore and Damascius. The latter in particular boosted the Proclean programme by harking back to Iamblichan methods of popularization (Athanassiadi 1999*a*: 46).

But the objective circumstances were so inimical that, far from investing the philosopher with power, the promotion of 'pagan holiness' hampered his public image.[26] Increasingly marginalized in social and political terms, the pagan philosopher realized that the only power he could wield in society was of a spiritual order, and that the seeds of this power could only be sown in the classroom and in the solitude of the study. The fruit of his efforts would thus reach posterity by the twin avenues of orality and of the written word, and the only sure way of achieving this objective was, as Iamblichus had decreed, hermeneutics.[27]

[25] Whether the influence of Salustius on Isidore served him as a stepping stone for his adherence to Sarapio is a question worth exploring, especially as some of the qualities that Isidore cultivated under this dual influence may have been instrumental in shaping Damascius' attitude to philosophy.

[26] The case of Hegias, who seems to have been the diadoch of the Academy in the 490s is telling: 'Aspiring to be the most pious of men, he completed work on the shrines of his relatives all over Attica, secretly, for he did not have their approval, and restored many holy places which had been lying in ruins for a long time, with an enthusiasm which was more indiscreet than pious. Thus he became notorious among his compatriots, attracting to himself dangerous enemies, of whom some desired the huge fortune that he possessed, and others conspired against him with the backing of the established order' (*PH* fr. 145b).

[27] A symbolic illustration of this is to be found in Marinus, *V. Procli* 30: when, towards the end of Proclus' life, 'those who move the immovable' took away from the cella of the Parthenon the cultic statue of Athena, the goddess, in the guise of a venerable lady, came to the doorstep of the philosopher and asked him if she could reside with him. This piece of Neoplatonic mythology, which mirrors the mood of the circle immediately after Proclus' death, also carries unequivocal messianic undertones for the adepts of the Platonic theology: repudiated from all official places, wisdom and learning went into hibernation in anticipation of more propitious times.

Neither the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate studies nor the methodological approach decreed by Iamblichus were in any way questioned by the generations of scholars who taught at the Academy, but the authority of Iamblichus as the indisputable interpreter of Platonic theology did not go unchallenged: 'We see and hear not a few among those who philosophize having the opinion, some that Iamblichus is utterly inaccessible, others that he glorified in wilful grandiloquence rather than the truth of things' (*PH* fr. 34b), reported Damascius, while Isidore had to reiterate his devotion and loyalty to Iamblichus in the face of constant provocation (fr. 34d). The significant detail in Isidore's view of the school's progress is that Syrianus, and not Proclus, was the best of the Moderns. In this connection it is worth recalling that at a relatively early stage in the history of Athenian Neoplatonism Syrianus wrote a didactic work on the agreement between Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato, which must have reproduced the main lines of Iamblichan syncretism both as ideology and method (*Suda* 4. 479. 1–2). But the most revealing comment of Damascius comes in the guise of a damning general criticism on the teaching of philosophy, presumably as practised by Proclus. Isidore 'did not want to compel either himself or his pupils to pursue the invisible truth through reasoning alone, herded together by syllogisms along a single road like the blind whom one guides on the right path. But he always strove to persuade them by placing eyes in their soul, or rather cleansing those which were already there' (fr. 38b).

Such was not Proclus' way. Indeed we have sufficient evidence on his methods of constructing orthodoxy: they consisted in guiding those who were prepared to listen by commenting on the prescribed texts, and in silencing any opposition by means of exclusion, or even slander. For his authority did not go unchallenged. 'The best of Proclus' pupils', Asclepiodotus, had in the end to be excluded from the Succession because he was impossible to control. 'He delighted in new ideas because of his extraordinary intelligence' (*CAG* ix. 795. 13–17). This judgement is passed on to us by one of the epigoni, Simplicius, who is clearly repeating what he heard from his own master, Damascius. One may note in passing that nothing of what 'the extremely sharp and erudite' Asclepiodotus wrote survives—a circumstance which might not be irrelevant to Proclus' ability to control orthodox thinking.

An even more interesting case than Asclepiodotus—indeed one of outright *damnatio memoriae*—concerns Domninus, the gifted fellow student of

Proclus and one on whom the status of diadoch had been conferred, possibly by Syrianus.[28] Domninus went down in history as 'a rather superficial' philosopher, since 'he distorted many of Plato's doctrines by introducing his own views. However, he was held to proper account for this *falsification* at the hands of Proclus, who wrote against him a whole treatise "purificatory" as its title indicates "of Plato's doctrines"' (*PH* fr. 89a).[29] But that was only half of Domninus' crime. He also transgressed on the norms of a pious life and ate meat every day, insisting that he had to do so for medical reasons, and interpreting in a far-fetched way the Pythagorean prohibitions on a meat diet to suit his purposes, so that it would appear that 'in his way of life he did not display that perfection that would entitle him to be called a true philosopher' (fr. 89a).

If we did not have the fragments of Damascius' *Philosophical History*, we would not know anything about Domninus' condemnation or Isidore's liberal teaching methodology and unconventional personality; or any other non-mainstream attitudes and behaviour among the men of Proclus' circle. As it is we know that Isidore (who significantly enough seems to have written nothing) was a difficult teacher, one who often 'spoke too profoundly for his pupils' understanding', and gave them insoluble problems to deal with (frs. 37b, 37c). His manner was far from clear as a result of personal deficiencies, at once intellectual and personal, which Damascius—possibly reproducing his master's point of view—turns into virtues. For example we learn that

> when lecturing, he lacked the linguistic skill necessary to present his views satisfactorily. And yet, not being unaided in this respect either by nature or by training, he still made zealous efforts at clarity. Leaving to others the graceful display of words, he occupied himself with revealing the thing itself, pronouncing concepts rather than words, or rather not even concepts as he brought to light the very essence of the things themselves (fr. 37d).

A man 'who had not read many books', but who, 'in the infinite rapture of his yearning after God resembled a seer who divined the truth by instinct' (fr. 37e), Isidore was a true *bacchus*, who through his passionate enthusiasm could *convert* people to the philosophical life. Indeed we know of at least two 'technicians', the Aristotelian Dorus (fr. 134a with note in Athanassiadi

[28] For a possible interpretation of the term *diadochos*, see Athanassiadi 1999*a*: 43.

[29] As is clear from many passages in Damascius' *Philosophical History*, by the time of Proclus there was only one orthodox way of interpreting Plato, and heretics were duly dealt with. Those who wished to remain within the Orthodox mainstream and receive the approval of their contemporaries and posterity had to destroy any of their own works which deviated from the dogmatic norm: cf. the case of Marinus, frs. 38a, 97j.

1999*a*) and, most importantly, the rhetorician Damascius (Athanassiadi 1999*a*: 32–6), whose soul Isidore 'unfurled for sailing on the vast sea of truth' (*PH* fr. 134a).

The Irreverent Damascius

It was through Proclus' triple activity—oral teaching, writing, and divine worship—that recognizable standards of orthodoxy were finally established for Hellenism, with the Athenian Academy acquiring all the formal and essential characteristics of a late antique theological college. Nor was his an achievement of one place and one time only. As a token of his lasting reputation, we possess the bulk of Proclus' writings, transmitted and preserved throughout the Christian centuries; this voluminous output establishes him as the supreme exegete of Plato, the transmitter of and quintessential commentator on Iamblichus—now co-terminous with orthodoxy—and consequently the indisputable authority on late pagan theology.[30] To such an extent was Proclus seen as the elucidator of Iamblichus' thought that, instead of battling with the Syrian's intractable text, people read his Athenian popularizer and exegete. The ultimate consequence of this was the loss of Iamblichus' systematic writings, such as his commentaries on the Platonic dialogues of the curriculum and on the Chaldaean Oracles, so that our view of them depends primarily on the references which are to be found in Proclus' works.[31]

Since Proclus was an intelligent, diligent, and honest reader who genuinely admired his Syrian predecessor, it is reasonable to assume that the way he represents him faithfully mirrors the true Iamblichus. For many decades such a supposition was treated as tantamount to certainty, but recently, since the work of the last diadoch of the Platonic Academy, the Syrian Damascius, with its abundant reference to Iamblichus, began to be studied, scholars are beginning to discover with a certain amount of surprise and unease that Damascius not only contradicts Proclus on important theological issues, but also bases his metaphysical theories on an interpretation of Iamblichus which goes totally against the Proclean view. Indeed,

[30] As the crowning achievement of a life devoted to Plato, Proclus wrote a *Platonic Theology* in many volumes; for the history of the text Saffrey and Westerink 1968: pp. cl–clx. Psellus' attitude to Proclus is indicative, if not characteristic, of the respect that the Byzantines paid to their late antique forebear: for references to Proclus in Psellus, cf. the *index locorum* in his *Philosophica Minora* i and ii (ed. J. M. Duffy and D. J. O'Meara).

[31] It is by no means coincidental that out of the ninety fragments which have been preserved from Iamblichus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, eighty-eight have been transmitted by Proclus alone.

as his own pupil, Simplicius, states 'Damascius did not hesitate to oppose many of Proclus' doctrines because of his taste for hard work and also *his appreciation of Iamblichus' theories*' (*CAG* ix. 795. 15–17).

What Simplicius reproduces here is clearly Damascius' own point of view, a proposition that the last head of the Academy must have reiterated in his formal lectures and private conversations in a multitude of ways. The implication is that Proclus had failed to understand Iamblichus and misrepresented him, so that, in the name of Platonic orthodoxy, the new holder of Plato's chair had to take corrective action. Judging from his surviving works, and especially his systematic work *On the First Principles* and his no less systematic *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Damascius fulfilled this task with ferocious methodicality: in both these works he systematically questioned Proclus' authority as the exegete of Neoplatonic metaphysics, while affirming his own link with Iamblichus. It is true (and of the utmost significance for the argument of this paper) that, under the pretext of interpreting Iamblichus, Damascius expounded a personal theological system which nevertheless proved too difficult to grasp as a theoretical structure and too vague to follow as a practical way—indeed, a system which, by being too critical and too liberal, confused people rather than guiding them.

The extent of Iamblichus' responsibility for Damascius' formidable metaphysics may be an unanswerable question. However, a common Syrian origin (which meant that the two men were exposed during their formative years to the specifically Semitic conception of God as wholly transcendent)[32] may not be irrelevant in this connection, and may well constitute a suitable starting-point on the right path for investigating the sources of Damascius and the breadth of his originality. What is important, however, for the present argument is that Damascius based his authority as the head of the regenerated Academy on the claim that he understood Iamblichus. To his mind this empathy with the 'second founder of Platonism' enabled him to relaunch the ship of faith on its right course from which it had drifted away as a result of Proclus' inexpert steering.

Such, however, was not posterity's view. And while Proclus was seen, in Psellos' phrase, as 'the ultimate harbour from which all science and precise understanding could be obtained' (*Chronogr.* 6. 38), Damascius was held responsible 'for the shipwreck of Neoplatonism'.[33] To be fair, the two men

[32] For the recognition of the fact, Damascius *De Princ.* 2. 100 with Combès 1986.

[33] Zeller's famous phrase (Zeller and Mondolfo 1961: vi. 218) not only encapsulates the mood of the generations between the 6th and the 19th cents., with very few remarkable exceptions, but seems also to have worked as a binding charm on scholarship for over a century after it was written.

had their share in the creation of their respective images. Proclus' attitude to himself and to the world was a balanced attitude, inspired by modesty and good will. His basic optimism and his need and ability to communicate his thought to others carried his uncomplicated understanding of the Platonic theology down to the present day with exemplary clarity. Conversely, Damascius' deeply pessimistic view of man and the world earned him the charge of misanthropy in his capacity as a social historian,[34] and of nihilism in theology.[35]

Indeed, Damascius' acute sense of the tragic condition of mankind makes him express himself like a philosopher of the absurd *avant la lettre*, a style that one would not have expected his Byzantine descendants to appreciate. If his craving for the absolute was fully in tune with the spirit of the age in which he lived, the irreverent manner in which he systematically exposed relativity in society and in the human soul, and the undignified way in which he wept over 'the compulsion of our miserable nothingness' (*De Princ.* 3. 141), were features that met with angry incomprehension from posterity. Indeed his overcritical attitude towards everything and everybody is still a cause of mystification among scholars. For Damascius revolts against God in the manner of a modern existentialist while at the same time deriding and scorning reason and intellectual achievement in the manner of a Byzantine holy man.

The most direct reason, however, for Damascius' lack of appeal among his contemporaries and immediate successors may be sought in his very understanding of Iamblichus. Proclus had established, in Iamblichus' name, an orthodoxy which was a good mix of all the ingredients required for the creation of a successful system.[36] His theology was sufficiently exotic to intrigue without shocking, with a ritual aspect that was at once attractive and respectable, and a hierarchical structure that was eminently logical and therefore easy to comprehend. But above all the Proclean vision was human, even benign, with the elements of hope and love paramount, and in this respect at least Proclus' understanding of Neoplatonism was true to the Iamblichan psychology.[37] By contrast, Damascius concentrated

[34] Cf. Photius' damning comments on the *Philosophical History*: *Bibl.* Cod. 181.

[35] One comes back to Zeller's angry comment (n. 33), which concludes an analysis portraying Damascius as a 19th-cent. nihilist.

[36] For belief among the epigoni in Proclus' infallibility in the understanding of Iamblichus, see the note that Simplicius scribbled in the margin of Proclus' *In Timaeum* (Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne* I, Paris 1968, p. CLIII): *Σιμπλικίου πόνος οὗτος· Τάμβλιχε δῶτερ ἐάων, ἴλαθι νικηθείς, ἀλλ'ὑπὸ σῶν ἐπέων.* (This is the work of Simplicius. Iamblichus, giver of good things, | Be gracious in defeat—since it came through your own words.)

[37] See the good analysis of Iamblichus' innovations in the domain of psychology by G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, Pennsylvania 1995, *passim*.

on Iamblichus' metaphysics, stressing the system's 'hard monotheism' and, over and above that, viewing it in the light of his own despair and putting it into words too soon and in too complicated a philosophical idiom. Like his master, Isidore, he respected his readers' critical faculty too much to offer his ideas in a dogmatic form. Yet by doing that, he was neither convincing enough nor sufficiently reassuring at a time when people sought unequivocal answers to the difficult questions.

A more careful reading of Damascius may—or may not—lead to a drastic revision of our appreciation of his contribution to philosophy. What is of essence to the present argument however is that, with all his originality and independence of mind, Damascius accepted the premise of a spiritual orthodoxy which was co-terminous with Iamblichus' understanding of Plato. His negative theology is put forward primarily as the correct reading of Iamblichus and therefore as the orthodox Platonic way from which his predecessors had deviated.

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VIII

A CONTRIBUTION TO MITHRAIC THEOLOGY: THE EMPEROR JULIAN'S *HYMN TO KING HELIOS*

THE certainty with which the father of Mithraic studies, Franz Cumont, pronounced his verdict on the historical origins and doctrinal structure of Mithraism can no longer be ours. 1975 saw the publication of two attempts to undermine the orthodoxies of Mithraic scholarship. R. L. Gordon, in an article entitled 'Franz Cumont and the doctrines of Mithraism',[1] subjected the Belgian scholar's conclusions to a radical questioning, and suggested that the doctrinal problems with which Mithraic scholars have traditionally been concerned are ultimately insoluble.[2] R. Turcan, on the other hand, while accepting Cumont's main conclusions, disputed the common assumption that the Emperor Julian was a Mithraist.[3] The purpose of the present paper is to argue not only that Julian was a convinced Mithraist, but also that his much misunderstood *Hymn to King Helios* sheds light on important aspects of Mithraic theology.

As A. D. Nock has pointed out, Mithraism was the one mystery religion in which initiation was a prerequisite for any worship of the god.[4] As a result of this peculiarity, the only trustworthy information

[1] *Mithraic Studies*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1975), i, pp. 215–48.

[2] Art. cit., p. 246.

[3] R. Turcan, *Mithras Platonicus: Recherches sur l'hellénisation philosophique de Mithra* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 105–28, tries to prove that Julian was not a Mithraist, or, at least, if he was one, that we have no evidence for it. Thus he says that the story told by Gregory of Nazianzos (iv. 55) refers to his initiation into the Neoplatonic Mysteries (p. 108, where he adroitly omits the passage on the *taurobolium*), dismisses the evidence of Libanius and Himerius, quoted below (see p. 362, nn. 2, 3), on the grounds that pagans of the mid fourth century should not be taken seriously when speaking of μυστήρια, μυήσεις, τελεταί, and even μιθραϊκὰ μυστήρια (p. 113), because of their general tendency to use a 'terminologie initiatique' which has 'rien de spécifiquement mystérique' (p. 113), and then proceeds to discuss the passages in which Julian refers to his devotion to Helios-Mithra, and comes to the conclusion that Julian was a heliolater, who used the name 'Mithra' rather than 'Helios' in order to shock the Christians (pp. 125–6). Thus he lightly dismisses even such incontestable evidence in favour of Julian's Mithraism as 336c and 155b. Turcan's interpretation of relevant passages in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* is highly arbitrary. His most serious objection to Julian's Mithraism is, possibly, the lack of coins in honour of the god, when Julian struck coins in honour of Isis and Serapis (p. 121 n. 113).

[4] 'Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments', *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Oxford, 1972), p. 797.

that we can have about the cult must be derived from the votive inscriptions, the iconography of Mithraea, and, above all, the few hints which are to be found in the writings of Mithraic initiates. Of these writings, those of Julian are by far the most interesting. Indeed, in his *Caesars* the emperor openly confesses his allegiance to Mithra: ' "I have granted thee knowledge of Father Mithra", said Hermes to me. "Do thou keep his commandments, and thus secure for thyself a cable and sure anchorage in this life; and when the hour of departure from this world strikes for thee thou mayst with good hope adopt Him as thy guide and guardian god" ' (336c). In an earlier work—his *Contra Heracleum*—Julian had specified in some detail in what these *commandments* consisted: worshipping the gods, displaying loyalty to his friends, treating his subjects with philanthropia, and on all occasions showing himself above passions and desires (233d–234a). If these ἐντολαί were fulfilled Julian would 'become god' and, like Athene, Helios, and Hermes, would achieve communion with the First transcendental Principle (234c).

That the Helios of the *Contra Heracleum* is in Julian's eyes identical with Mithra is beyond doubt. Apart from his use of the specifically Mithraic term ἐντολαί with reference to the god,[1] there is sound evidence in support of this view scattered all over Julian's writings. In the *Hymn to the Mother of the gods* Helios is described as ἑπτάκτις (172d), an epithet often used in Mithraic texts to refer to the sun;[2] in the *Hymn to King Helios* there is a reference to Cautes and Cautopates, the two comites of Mithra, whom Julian calls Ἡλίου πάρεδροι (150d), and attempts to identify with Ares and Hermes.[3] In the same speech, addressing his flock in his capacity of pontifex maximus, the emperor writes: 'if I tell you that we worship Mithra and celebrate quadrennial games in honour of Helios, I shall appear to be saying novelties' (155b). Helios again was the god whom Julian acknowledged as solely responsible for the happy outcome of his revolt against Constantius (*ep.* 28), and as soon as he entered the capital he erected a Mithraeum within his own palace as a thank-offering to the god who

[1] On Mithra's *commandments*, see Gordon, 'Mithraism and Roman Society: Social factors in the explanation of religious change in the Roman empire', *Religion*, ii (1972), p. 106, who mentions a phrase painted on the wall of the Santa Prisca Mithraeum: 'And I have borne upon my shoulders the commands of the gods to their fulfilment'.

[2] See Proclus, *Tim.* 11e; cf. Turcan, op. cit., p. 118.

[3] Cf. 154ab; for a suggested correction, see D. Sourdel, *Les Cultes du Hauran* (Paris, 1952), p. 74 n. 1. For the etymology of the names of the Mithraic torchbearers, see M. Schwartz, 'Cautes and Cautopates, the Mithraic Torchbearers', *Mithraic Studies*, ii. pp. 406–23.

had ensured the success of his revolt.[1] Thus from the moment when Julian became sole emperor his devotion to Mithra was strengthened by regular religious practices: in his private Mithraeum he possibly reached the highest grades as an adept of the mysteries,[2] as well as personally initiating one of his close friends and collaborators, the sophist Himerius.[3] The Mithraeum in the palace was to Julian's mind an irrefutable proof of his devotion to the cult of Helios-Mithra. Thus, when at Antioch he composes his dogmatic hymn to the god, he says near the beginning: 'Indeed I am a devotee of King Helios; the most clear evidence I can produce for this is at home' (*οἴκοι παρ' ἐμαυτῷ*, a clear reference to the Mithraeum in the Imperial palace in Constantinople (130)).

Unfortunately, the lines of Julian's thought, as it is expressed in the *Hymn to King Helios*, are somewhat complicated by the fact that he makes extensive use of Neoplatonic vocabulary. As Cumont pointed out, 'il est impossible de déterminer dans le discours obscur *Εἰς βασιλέα Ἥλιον* ce que l'empereur sophiste emprunte aux théories mithriaques et ce qui lui appartient en propre',[4] by which he means the language of Iamblichan Neoplatonism. In fact Julian's oration is far from obscure, but in order to demonstrate this it is necessary to establish first of all some criteria for deciding what are the Mithraic elements in the *Hymn to King Helios*.

In matters of religion Julian was a conservative who believed that all theological knowledge had been revealed to mankind by divinely inspired prophets; he deplored the fact that he was merely of royal stock, and expressed his envy for the good fortune of those to whom 'God had granted a body built of holy and prophetic seed, thus assigning to them the duty of unlocking the treasures of wisdom' (131b). This statement of faith, which significantly enough comes from the opening page of the *Hymn to King Helios*, is sufficient evidence that Julian did not consider himself entitled to make any original contribution to the stock of theological doctrines that he had inherited from the Platonic tradition or from the teaching of the Mithraic and other mysteries. On the other hand, he did feel that, as a Roman emperor and pontifex maximus, he had the right and even the obligation to stress

[1] It should be remembered that in Constantinople Julian did not take any particular care to restore old temples or to build new ones, cf. G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974), p. 376.

[2] Lib. xviii. 127: *καὶ μυστηρίων μετέσχε . . . μυηθείς τε ἐν μέρει . . .*

[3] Himerius, xli. 8–9, 1–2; Lib. xviii. 127.

[4] *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (*MMM*) i, (Brussels, 1899), p. 28.

the essential unity and coherence underlying some of the many forms that religious sensibility assumed in late antiquity. As a good Neoplatonist Julian subscribed to the view that, as truth is one, so too is philosophy, and applied himself to the task of proving this with reference to all the major branches of Greek philosophy, except of course Scepticism and Epicureanism.[1] It is interesting to know that in pursuing this aim Julian did not force his evidence even once, though on the other hand, not a single original idea or even interpretation of his sources is to be found in the speech *Πρὸς τοὺς ἀπαιδεύτους κύνας*, which is the text *par excellence* where Julian attempts to express his syncretistic conception of philosophy.

It follows *a fortiori* that Julian would not have distorted the theological doctrines which he discusses in the *Hymn to King Helios*; once he had subscribed to the fundamental Magian doctrine of the identity of Helios with Mithra,[2] Julian could only treat of those aspects of Platonic and Mithraic theology which were mutually compatible. Thus in the following analysis of parts of the *Hymn to King Helios*, whose object is to check the validity of some of the more fragile assertions that Cumont put forward about Mithraism, two criteria will be employed: (*a*) whatever is not Platonic, that is whatever is not to be found either in Iamblichus or in Proclus (who preserved and expounded the main points of Iamblichan Neoplatonism), stands already a good chance of being Mithraic;[3] and (*b*) no Platonic dogma referred to explicitly in the text can possibly be irreconcilable with the tenets of Mithraism, for, as has already been said, Julian's syncretism, if unoriginal, was none the less systematic and conscientious.

Julian's dual allegiance is apparent right from the beginning of the Hymn. He admits being a devotee of King Helios by virtue of his initiation into Mithraism, and then goes on to explain how, over the lonely years of his adolescence, his intuition had enabled him to discover the principles which lie at the root of Neoplatonic heliolatry. In words borrowed from Iamblichus, Julian describes the mystical soaring of his soul as he contemplated the night sky at Macellum. At this point he calls the attention of his public (the entire population of the Roman empire, as he solemnly states at the very outset)[4] to the fact that he is composing his speech in order to commemorate the

[1] Julian, 184c, 185c, 186a, 188bc; *ep.* 89b, 301bc.

[2] See Gordon, 'Franz Cumont . . .', p. 243.

[3] It should be noted that Julian's oration bears little connection with Porphyry's philosophical treatise on the Sun, which has been preserved in its main lines in Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, i. 17–22.

[4] 130b: "*Προσήκειν ὑπολαμβάνω τοῦ λόγου τοῦδε μάλιστα μέν ἅπασιν ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνείει τε καὶ ἕρπει*" (cf. Homer P 447).

feast of *Ἡλιαῖα* (131d; 156c), instituted by Aurelian in honour of Sol Invictus, a god, as we have seen, regarded by Julian as identical with Mithra (155b). This is something that the Imperial theologian will not allow us to forget: that it is precisely through his *Hymn to King Helios* that the Romanized Syrian cult of Sol Invictus on the one hand and Roman Mithraism on the other are integrated into the Hellenic philosophical tradition as represented by Platonism.

First of all Julian puts a Platonic seal on his Hymn by addressing it to 'King' Helios. The royal nature of the planet sun, the ruler of the sensible universe, had already been asserted by Plato in a famous passage where he developed the analogy that exists between the worlds of the senses and of the spirit: the luminous principle reigning over the physical universe, the ungenerated source of all life,[1] is but the direct emanation of the Idea of *τὸ ἀγαθόν*, the supreme principle of the metaphysical world and the origin of truth and all science.[2] The clear, strong, and direct physical light with which Plato's eyes were familiar was for him the only symbol fit to convey the ineffable beauty of transcendental truth shining over the regions beyond, while the healthy eyes, able to sustain the vision of light, served to denote the soul illuminated by truth.[3]

These notions are crucial to our understanding of Julian's solar theology. The emperor himself in his Hymn to Helios reproduces *in extenso* the passage from the *Republic* establishing the analogy between the two distinct universes to which every human being belongs actually and potentially.[4] Then, in order to convey effectively the way in which the soul can reach the transcendental sphere, where everything is ineffable, he introduces the intelligent world of Iamblichus and of the *Chaldaean Oracles* (148a) as an explicit link between the two Platonic regions (133c).

The basic Platonic dichotomy is always at the back of Julian's mind, but, belonging as he did to a period when Hellenism had become but the commentator of its own spirit, he was bound to conceive and present in an exegetical manner what he knew in his heart to be but a simple and straightforward truth. It is the period when the notion of salvation becomes inextricably linked in men's consciousness with that of a mediating Logos—Christ or Mithra, Attis or Asclepios—and Julian is a genuine child of this period. Accordingly, his Hymn has

[1] See 133a and Plato, *Rep.* 509b.

[2] Plato, *Rep.* 508bc.: *τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἔκγονος, ὃν τἀγαθὸν ἐγέννησεν ἀνάλογον ἑαυτῷ.* Cf. *ep.* ii, 312e; Plot. v. 1. 8; ii. 9. 9.

[3] Plato, *Phaedr.* 250d; *Rep.* 508cd; *Tim.* 47a; cf. Julian 172d.

[4] 133a and Plato, *Rep.* 508bc.

a great deal to say about the intelligent god Mithra, emanation of the First Principle and spiritual counterpart of the visible sun (133bc). Thus, in describing the substance, powers, and energies, both visible and invisible, and the blessings that the Sun in his three hypostases bestows throughout the Intelligible, Intellectual, and Sensible worlds (132b), Julian concentrates largely on the second hypostasis of Helios, the one manifested in Mithra-μεσίτης (138c ff.)

The evidence provided in the *Hymn to King Helios* therefore enables us to resolve the dispute which has arisen about the mediating role played by Mithra in the religion that took its name from him. Cumont held this mediation to be at once cosmic, moral, and theological: as a cosmic power, Mithra mediates between Oromasdes and Arimanius, the gods of good and evil; on a more abstract level, this μεσότης accounts for the role of Mithra as the constant supporter of Man in his struggle towards the goal of moral excellence, while in theological terms it symbolizes the median position of Mithra-Logos between Man in his fallen state and the First transcendental Principle of infinite time, Zervan. The centrality of Mithra is further ensured by the middle position of the sun in the planetary order. Finally, in his iconography, the god's mediating function is conveyed by his representation as part of a triad: two torch-bearers, Cautes and Cautopates, whose respective attitudes recall *Sol oriens* and *Sol occidens*, stand on either side of Mithra-μεσίτης who, occupying the middle position, symbolizes the sun at its zenith.[1]

Gordon disputed Cumont's view of the centrality of Mithra on all these points, except for the very last.[2] Julian's evidence, however, supports Cumont unreservedly on these issues, except for the first, which, as being directly relevant to the problem of cosmic dualism in Mithraism, will be discussed later.

First of all, we shall consider the position of Mithra-Helios in the planetary order. In recurrent passages Julian tells us that the royal nature of the planet sun is ensured by its middle position in the universe,[3] and contrasts this apparently Mithraic theory with the Chaldaean dogma according to which the sun does not occupy the centre of the planetary sphere but moves far above even the sphere of the fixed stars (148ab).[4] It is interesting to know that Julian acknowledges the distinction between the view he holds himself and that put forward by

[1] See *MMM* i, pp. 211–12, 303, 307–8, 340.

[2] 'Franz Cumont . . .', pp. 228–32.

[3] 135bc, 146c, 156ab.

[4] Cf. J. Bidez–F. Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d'après la tradition grecque* (Paris, 1938), i, p. 110; ii, pp. 229–30.

the Chaldaeans, much of whose wisdom, as we know, had been accepted by Iamblichus. No other cosmological teaching occurs in the oration, and, since it is part of its purpose to expand Mithraic doctrine, we can only assume *ex silentio* that one of its tenets was the median position of the sun. Mithra's centrality in a local sense is apparent from his iconography, as Julian is quick to point out (150cd). But the main argument of the oration consists in establishing the centrality of Helios-Mithra in theological terms. His is a *μέση* and *ἑνοειδὴς τελειότης . . . ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς ἱδρυμένη θεοῖς* (139c).[1] In an important passage which concludes the analysis of the essence of *νοερὸς ἥλιος*, we find the following definition which in many ways recalls the language in which the Logos-Christ is described in the Nicene Creed:

> *ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν προῆλθε τοῦ θεοῦ εἷς ἀφ' ἑνὸς τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου βασιλεὺς Ἥλιος, τῶν νοερῶν θεῶν μέσος ἐν μέσοις τεταγμένος κατὰ παντοίαν μεσότητα . . . εἰς ἕνωσιν ἄγων τὰ τελευταῖα τοῖς πρώτοις* (141d–142a).[2]

In terms of the divine economy, then, Mithra is the connective force between the transcendental First Principle and Man. The moral implications of this statement will become clear later, but what is of crucial importance here is to see what symbolic mythological terms Julian uses when speaking of the *νοητόν* First Principle. The *νοερός* god Mithra is presented as the son of *Ὑπερίων* (135d–136c), the *θειότατος* and *ὑπέρτατος* and *πάντων ἐπέκεινα* (136d). This again agrees with what we know of the Mithraic belief in a transcendental First Principle, known as *Αἰών*, *Χρόνος-Κρόνος*, or Zervan,[3] a major point of Cumont's thesis, that Gordon challenged, but by no means conclusively.[4]

At the other end of the ladder lies sinful humanity upon which Helios showers his gifts (152d–153d). Having created the world and established order in it, Helios-Mithra also became the founder of civilized life, bringing to mankind religion, culture, and political institutions. Referring to the spiritual experience promised to the devotees of the mysteries, Julian speaks of the role of Helios-Mithra as the *ψυχοπομπός* of the individual soul towards the *νοητὸς κόσμος* (136ab; 152ab). The emperor's presentation of Mithra as the *ἡγεμών* of the disincarnate soul in its trip through the planetary universe fits absolutely with Cumont's description, which indeed Gordon refrained from challenging.[5]

[1] Cf. 133bc, 138c.
[2] Cf. 133a, 141b.
[3] For Julian Hyperion is identical with Kronos.
[4] See *MMM* i, pp. 75–84; cf. Gordon, 'Franz Cumont . . .', pp. 221–4.
[5] Ibid., p. 232.

So far we have seen that Mithra's mediating function, so much insisted on by Cumont, is further demonstrated by the evidence of the *Hymn to King Helios*, a text that Cumont himself dismissed as too obscure for consideration. Our next point concerns the role of Mithra as creator of the animal world and maintainer of order in it. On the evidence of Eubulus, and in the absence of further information relating to the creation theme, Gordon seems to grant Cumont the point that Mithra was indeed a creator within the context of the theology of the mysteries.[1] According to Julian, Helios *τὰ μὲν γὰρ τελειοῖ τῶν εἰδῶν, τὰ δὲ ἐργάζεται, τὰ δὲ κοσμεῖ, τὰ δὲ ἀνεγείρει, καὶ ἓν οὐδέν ἐστιν ὃ δίχα τῆς ἀφ' Ἡλίου δημιουργικῆς δυνάμεως εἰς φῶς πρόεισι καὶ γένεσιν* (140b), for *τὰς ἐνδιδομένας ἅπασιν* (i.e. *τοῖς νοεροῖς θεοῖς*) *ἐκεῖθεν δυνάμεις εἰς τὴν γῆν οὗτος φαίνεται τελεσιουργῶν καὶ συναρμόζων πρός τε ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὸ πᾶν* (138c).[2] The double theme of the creation of the visible world and its ordering is further expanded in 144d–145a, a passage which is in essential agreement with what Cumont has to say of the role of Mithra as creator and maintainer of natural order.[3] His detailed exposé is based on his interpretation of iconographical material in the light of Zoroastrian sources and on scanty Greco-Roman texts.[4] Yet, as Gordon rightly points out at the beginning of his article, Cumont's reconstruction of the creation myth—as also of that of the end of the world in the Mithraic Mysteries—presupposes a direct line of descent from Zoroastrianism to Western Mithraism via the Magian tradition which flourished in Asia Minor towards the end of the ancient era. This descent can only be proved through Western Mithraic evidence, as for instance that provided by Julian.

In addition to his explicit but highly theoretical discussions of Helios as creator, Julian also refers in the Hymn to the *myth of creation* as the outcome of the killing of the bull. By identifying Helios with Dionysos-Zagreus—the god torn asunder by the Titans according to the Orphic–Pythagorean tradition, and 'therefore the patron of divided substance' (144c)[5]—Julian emphasizes the connection between the two mythological traditions, Mithraic and Orphic, which relate the drama of individualization in almost identical terms.[6]

[1] See Eubulus, ap. Porph. *De antro* 6; cf. 24. Gordon, art. cit., pp. 226–7. R. Turcan, op. cit., pp. 21–2, shows that it was within the context of the Greek philosophical tradition that Mithra the mediator was little by little transformed into Mithra the creator.

[2] Cf. 151b.

[3] *MMM* i, pp. 306 ff. See also Julian, 137d, 145d, 152a, 157bc.

[4] *MMM* i, pp. 169 ff.

[5] Cf. Proclus, *Tim.* 200c.

[6] For the affinities between the Orphic and Mithraic theologies, see Bidez–Cumont, *Mages hellénisés*, i, p. 97, as also Turcan, op. cit., pp. 132–3.

Although Julian's evidence in the *Hymn to King Helios* amply confirms Cumont's statement that Mithra was a creator and the perpetual orderer of the natural universe, it does not confirm Mithraic belief in a cosmic dualism. Over this major issue Gordon attacked Cumont with particular vehemence and, it would appear, with justification. Relying exclusively on his intuitive gift Cumont interpreted his evidence in the light of preconceived ideas, and asserted that Mithraism, like Zoroastrianism, was a dualistic system in which the principles of good and evil, light and darkness were respectively embodied by Oromasdes and Arimanius.[1] In fact the only evidence in Julian pointing to a dual conception of human nature is his profession of the commonly accepted Platonic view of the antagonism between soul and body (142d). This, however, does not imply belief in cosmic dualism for, as is well known, the Platonists, far from having a positive conception of the evil as a cosmic power, defined it as deprivation or non existence. Thus the idea of an evil power personified by Arimanius and incessantly combatting Mithra's work is as absent from Julian's Hymn as from any other Mithraic sources. Similarly, the idea of Oromasdes-Jupiter as the god of good, under whose orders Mithra acts,[2] is equally unsupported by the evidence of Julian who, using Iamblichan language, presents Zeus as a *νοερὸς θεός*, equal and often identifiable with Helios.[3]

As for his views on creation and eschatology, Julian adheres to the Platonic, or rather Neoplatonic, doctrine of the pre-existence and indestructibility of the universe.[4] Helios-Mithra appears as an equivalent of the Platonic demiurge, who does not create *ex nihilo*, and in this connection Julian's description agrees with Cumont's thesis.[5] Yet Cumont also deals at length with Mithraic eschatology, according to which at the end of time Mithra will resurrect men and judge them according to their deeds; the wicked together with Arimanius will then perish in a final conflagration and the reign of the just will for ever be established.[6] Gordon attacked Cumont on this point as well,[7] and with reason, for even if we could be absolutely sure that Western Mithraism is of Persian origin, still we should not be entitled to use Eastern evidence to explain Western phenomena.

[1] *MMM* i, pp. 39–40, 306, 310.

[2] *MMM* i, p. 207. See Gordon, art. cit., pp. 227–8.

[3] 135d; cf. 136a: *κοινὴν ὑπολάβωμεν, μᾶλλον δὲ μίαν Ἡλίου καὶ Διὸς ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς θεοῖς δυναστείαν.*

[4] 132c, 145d, 146ab.

[5] For an account of ancient interpretations of Plato, *Tim.* 28–9, on the problem of creation, see A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford, 1928), pp. 65 ff. See also Turcan, op. cit., p. 86.

[6] *MMM* i, pp. 187–8, 310–11; cf. 33–4.

[7] Gordon, art. cit., pp. 233 ff.

In this connection, Julian's evidence in the *Hymn to King Helios* flatly contradicts Cumont's hypothesis. The emperor openly professes belief in the indestructibility of the universe; as is natural in a Platonist, he rejects the idea of a constant battle between good and evil,[1] and acknowledges the essential goodness of all creation. Of the eschatological theories related by Cumont, none agrees with what Julian says on this subject. On the other hand, the emperor's evidence seems to justify Cumont's intuition regarding the fate of the individual soul travelling after death through the seven planetary spheres under Mithra's guidance.[2] Indeed the concluding paragraph of the speech indicates that the soul of the devotee was submitted to Mithra's judgement immediately after its separation from the body (158bc). No system of retribution is attested by Julian, though clearly his description suggests belief in a variety of states from the divine (cf. 234c) downwards, to any one of which the initiate might be allotted, depending on his moral and spiritual progress on earth. Once it enters the spheres inhabited by the κρείττονα γένη (151bc, cf. 145c), the individual soul[3] comes directly under the beneficent influence of the sun who guides it with justice, purifies it, and makes it capable of exercising judgement (151c).

This description of the Sun as the judge *par excellence* not only fits with the abundant evidence we have of Mithra κριτής, but also provides yet another clue for the understanding of an apparently obscure passage on Ἀνάγκη (146d), about which Julian admits that it must be ἀξύνετον . . . τοῖς Ἕλλησι (146d–147a). This is a point of crucial importance. Here Julian pays his tribute of honour to the specifically Mithraic goddess Ἀνάγκη–Θέμις, who, as Cumont showed by using independent evidence, was a double personification of the most vital and ubiquitous notion in Mithraic ethics.[4] The double character of the goddess of justice is further illustrated by Julian's reference to the Dioscuri, whose dual nature symbolized in the teaching of the mysteries the two faces of Justice as the at once mild and inexorable principle ruling over human affairs (147a–c). Julian's treatment of the Dioscuri myth, both in its moral and its cosmic meaning, supports Cumont's interpretation of the same myth, and provides

[1] Neoplatonists on the whole believed in the existence of wicked demons, but held their power to be confined to the sublunary sphere: see Porphyry, *De antro* 6; 12; *Ad Marc.* 11, cf. ibid. 16, 21; Iamblichus, *De myst.* iii. 31; iv. 13, 7; cf. ix. 7. Julian, 175b.

[2] 146c, 158bc, 336c.

[3] This is how μεριστός should be translated in this context; cf. Liddell-Scott-Jones, s.v.

[4] *MMM* i, p. 152; cf. *Mages hellénisés*, ii, p. 155.

additional evidence, against Gordon, for the importance of the notion of necessity in Mithraism.[1]

A last point bears on the cult of the Four Elements which, as Cumont deduced from the iconographical and literary evidence, was of the utmost importance in Mithraism.[2] As a Mithraist Julian could not ignore such an important tenet of his religion while, on the other hand, as a Platonist he could not possibly profess belief in the divinity of the four elements. He found a solution by compromising between the two creeds and presenting Helios as the co-ordinator of the gods assigned to rule the quadruple nature of the Elements (151bc). It is with specific reference to the worship of the elements in Mithraism that Gordon could write, 'Cumont's chapter in *Textes et monuments* entitled "La Doctrine des mystères" is almost entirely composed of speculation of this type, with only the remotest foundation in the evidence'.[3] In this connection, Julian's evidence provides a singularly strong buttress for Cumont's edifice.

Iamblichus' syncretistic philosophy was admittedly difficult and inaccessible to the masses but by no means a mystery cult revealed only to those initiates who by submitting to ritual acts had gained illumination. Accordingly in his *Hymn to King Helios* Julian does not hesitate to acknowledge his source and pay his tribute of honour to the master of Apamaea.[4] It is otherwise, however, with the teachings of Mithraism; Julian is particularly cautious when discussing these: right at the beginning of the oration, after some obscure hints about his regular religious practices at the Mithraeum in Constantinople and about the πίστεις of his spiritual progress as a Mithraist, Julian declares that he will subsequently mention only ὃ . . . θέμις εἰπεῖν καί ἀνεμέσητον (130c). Further he refers to the θεραπεία τοῦ δεσπότου, which as a private cult is reserved for the happy few (131d), while in two other passages the emperor speaks of the wisdom that the god himself instils in his initiates by way of divine inspiration (137c; 142c). Finally, the pontifex maximus admits openly that up to his day Mithraism had remained a *religio externa*,[5] and warns his flock that, at the cost of appearing an innovator,[6] he attempts through his speech to infuse Hellenism into the body of Mithraism and thus present the Roman world with a consistent

[1] *MMM* i, pp. 85 ff.; cf. 301. See Gordon, art. cit., p. 216.
[2] *MMM* i, pp. 81, 101–9, 199, 211, 298.
[3] Gordon, art. cit., p. 220.
[4] 146a, 150d, 157cd.
[5] 155b; cf. A. D. Nock, 'The genius of Mithraism', *Essays*, p. 453 n. 3, who points out that Julian here speaks 'in terms of his own personal devotion'; see also Gordon, art. cit., p. 247.
[6] For Julian's hatred of innovation see *C. Th.* v. 20. 1; *ep.* 89A, 453b.

and viable religious system, made up of all the current traditions and practices of solar worship. It should be emphasized, nevertheless, that in acting thus Julian was not so much urged by political motives as expressing an innermost belief.

When composing his *Hymn to King Helios*, the emperor is in full possession of the sacred knowledge reserved to the initiates: by an act of heavenly grace he has been gratified with the highest form of religious experience, that of divine ecstasy (230b; 231b), but whether within the context of the Mithraic Mysteries or of Neoplatonism is impossible to tell, for Julian was no mere scholar but a man of fervent religious feeling who, in his search for metaphysical truth progressed by destroying barriers between systems rather than by erecting new ones. At Macellum, as a recluse adolescent, Julian had had an intuition of the fundamental unity of all spiritual life, and, in the absence of anyone to guide and instruct him, he had instinctively found in the surrounding cosmos the answers to the questions which tormented his overcurious nature. Little by little, his need for love and communication and his thirst for knowledge were fused into a δεινός πόθος for the rays of the Sun (130c), which with the passing of the years was fed by the specific knowledge contained in the dogmas of Mithraism and the philosophical teaching of Iamblichus. But it must have been a great relief for Julian to discover that at the end of his spiritual Odyssey there still lay Ithaca—the starting-point of his peregrination. As of old —but now forgetful, though not ignorant of all the subtle (and ultimately immaterial) distinctions between theological systems—Julian could give himself up unreservedly to the worship of the one God—Helios.

IX

LE TRAITEMENT DU MYTHE : DE L'EMPEREUR JULIEN À PROCLUS

Φιλόμυθοι πάντες ἐσμέν
Proclus, *In Rempublicam*

Préambule

Nous sommes tous amis des mythes, de ces contes qui émerveillent les sens en faisant appel à la partie émotive de notre âme. Transmis par le moyen de la poésie épique et tragique, les principaux mythes des Grecs concernent les dieux et les hommes et leurs rapports mutuels dans un même contexte. Cette dégradation du monstrueux qui caractérise la mythologie grecque, en d'autres termes son anthropomorphisme physique et moral à l'égard des dieux, lui a valu de bonne heure une critique sévère de la part des philosophes : en suivant les traces de Xénophane, Platon s'attaque à Homère et à Hésiode et finit par bannir les mythographes de sa cité idéale[1]. Ce qui lui nuit, c'est l'obscénité des histoires sur les dieux ; mais aussi leur sentimentalité qui, selon l'analyse de Proclus, « excite immodérément les passions » et finit par accoutumer les jeunes à pleurer et à rire sans aucune raison[2]. En même temps, Platon s'oppose à l'usage du mythe en tant qu'allégorie, comme pratiqué par les Sophistes de son temps (*Prot.* 316de) ; comme il le dit dans *la République*, il rejette le mythe dans tous ses aspects, en tant que fable simple ou allégorie au sens caché[3]. Pourtant, la partie à la fois la plus profonde et la plus fascinante de sa propre œuvre est purement mythographique. Essayons, sinon de la résoudre, du moins de procurer à cette contradiction une certaine explication.

C'est un truisme que, chaque fois que Platon veut communiquer une vérité supérieure, il a recours au mythe ; mais les mythes dont il se sert n'appartiennent pas au répertoire banal dans lequel puisent leur matériau poètes et sophistes. Empruntés à la tradition orale et adaptés à ses propres besoins, ou même inventés par lui-même, les mythes de Platon se distinguent par leur individualité[4]. Et, comme il le dit lui-même, ce sont des discours plutôt que des mythes, mais des discours qui dépassent l'intelligence discursive – la simple διάνοια – pour s'adresser à l'intelligence intuitive – le νοῦς.

Platon aime à jouer avec l'ambiguïté sémantique du mot *mythos*, qui connote à la fois le mythe et la parole. Dans le *Timée*, l'alternance entre « discours vrai-

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1. Diogène Laërce, IX 18 (pour Xénophane) et Platon, livres III et X de la *République* et notamment 377e — 378d et 600c-e.

2. Proclus, *In Remp.* I 50, 26-7 et 51, 4 ; cf. *infra* (II, *Proclus*).

3. 378d : καὶ θεομαχίας ὅσας Ὅμηρος πεποίηκεν οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὔτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν.

4. Pour la dette de Platon à la tradition pythagoricienne, voir l'analyse de P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic : Empedocles and the Pythagorean Tradition*, Oxford 1995, p. 88.

semblable » et « mythe vraisemblable », qui a tant intrigué les chercheurs, est loin d'être une devise stylistique ou un produit d'inattention[5]. C'est un choix délibéré : ce que les naïfs prennent pour mythe est le discours du sage (*Gorg.* 523a), mais un discours dont seule une petite minorité d'initiés peut pénétrer le sens caché. Instrument vital pour communiquer la pensée du philosophe, le mythe platonicien est, en effet, un méta-discours qui, à l'inverse des mythes poétiques qui touchent la partie la plus basse de l'âme humaine, transcende le domaine de la logique. Voilà pourquoi Platon s'acharne à nettoyer l'arène dans laquelle il va s'exercer lui-même de tout rival, ancien ou moderne, opération dans laquelle – rappelons-le – il a spectaculairement échoué. Car, ayant une fois puissamment associé le mythe à la philosophie, Platon lui a assuré un brillant avenir dans ce domaine.

Héritiers des Sophistes, contre qui guerroyait Socrate, les Stoïciens se sont adonnés à l'interprétation systématique du Mythe, qu'ils se mettent à allégoriser à l'aide des jongleries étymologiques[6]. Dans leur perspective, chacun des Olympiens représente un aspect de l'activité du dieu cosmique. Forces de la Nature ou éléments de l'univers physique, les dieux de la mythologie populaire proclament leur identité à travers leurs noms : Héra est l'air et Déméter la terre[7]. Mais, en même temps que cette ingénieuse exploitation des possibilités du langage humain, leurs recherches historiques permettent aux Stoïciens de présenter les dieux comme les grands bienfaiteurs de jadis, héroïsés, et même divinisés, par la gratitude de plusieurs générations.

Interprétée dans un esprit hostile, cette logique évhémériste finit par signifier que « tous ceux qui reçoivent un culte à titre divin ont d'abord été des hommes »[8]. Caricaturant un des aspects majeurs du traitement stoïcien du mythe, cette remarque de Lactance est faite dans le but bien précis d'attaquer le paganisme ; mais, le rabaissement du numineux au niveau du physique et du moral par la sanctification de la géographie et de l'histoire, avait, bien avant l'arrivée des chrétiens, nui aux sensibilités des philosophes, provoquant des débats orageux. Dans son *De natura deorum*, Cicéron dresse le bilan – un bilan sans doute un peu schématique, mais qui traduit bien l'ambiance qui dominait le discours philosophique de son époque – des objections portées contre l'allégorisme du Portique par les représentants de l'Académie et du Jardin[9]. Deux siècles plus tard, Sextus Empiricus s'attaquera avec une virulence renouvelée à la position stoïcienne, prouvant ainsi combien la querelle sur le traitement de la mythologie restait vivante parmi les adeptes de différentes traditions philosophiques[10].

Avec le renouveau pythagoricien, le mythe réclamait déjà dans l'imaginaire collectif un autre rôle que celui que lui assignaient les querelles des pédants. Associé aux mystères ou à une philosophie qui disputait de plus en plus son espace

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5. Voir l'analyse de B. Kalfas, *Τίμαιος : εισαγωγή, μετάφραση, σχόλια*, Athènes 1995, p. 41-63.

6. Sur les mécanismes de la démarche allégorique dans le Portique, voir l'excellent article d'A. Le Boulluec, « L'allégorie chez les Stoïciens », *Poétique* 23 (1975), p. 304-321 [= *Alexandrie antique et chrétienne : Clément et Origène*, Paris 2006, p. 325-355].

7. Diogène Laërce VII 147.

8. Lactance, *De ira Dei*, 11.7.

9. Selon le commentaire ironique de l'épicurien Velleius, les poètes anciens, tel Orphée, Musée, Hésiode et Homère, étaient des Stoïciens, sans l'avoir jamais soupçonné : Cicéron, *De nat. deor.* I 41.

10. *Adv. Math.* IX 34-41. H. Mutschmann (éd.), *Sextus Empiricus, Opera* II, Leipzig 1914.

à la religion, le mythe devenait un instrument de salut, qui, grâce à sa qualité initiatique, orientait le fidèle vers l'au-delà, lui offrant un savoir en dehors des procédés rationnels et mnémoniques. Dans ce développement, graduel et lent, qui assignait au mythe un pouvoir cathartique, voire magique, l'apport crucial fut celui de Numénius d'Apamée qui, au IIe siècle de notre ère, lança, sans doute après bien d'autres, mais d'une manière aussi tranchante que précise, la relecture de Platon dans un esprit pythagoricien et, même, œcuménique[11]. Dans un ouvrage qu'il intitula *Des secrets de Platon*, Numénius abordait de manière, paraît-il, systématique les mythes platoniciens, proposant une interprétation théologique pour les plus obscurs parmi eux et donnant comme explication de l'obscurité du discours platonicien, le refus de l'auteur de parler ouvertement devant un public qui aurait répondu à sa franchise en lui imposant le sort qu'il avait réservé à Socrate (fr. 23).

Cachée sous le voile du mythe, la vérité, révélée par la divinité à ses élus parmi « les peuples de renom », se retrouve chez Homère et Platon, mais aussi dans les cultes à mystères. C'est avec cette conviction que Numénius pénètre une image homérique, celle de l'antre des nymphes dans l'île d'Ithaque (*Odyssée* 13.109-112). Citant Moïse et Pythagore, Parménide et Héraclite, mais se servant aussi de la théologie égyptienne, de la science chaldaïque et de l'astrologie mithriaque, il interprète le passage homérique dans un esprit platonicien, identifiant l'antre marin avec le monde sensible, dans lequel l'âme descend pour repartir vers son salut[12].

Dans sa transposition du mythe de la sphère savante à la sphère métaphysique, comme dans bien d'autres démarches, Numénius fut suivi par Plotin, qui établit, dans un but purement didactique, une analogie entre la mythologie traditionnelle et son propre système philosophique[13]. Mais si l'on est assez fortuné pour posséder un corpus de l'enseignement plotinien qui nous permet de nous faire une idée précise sur sa manière d'aborder quantité de sujets touchant à l'esthétique, la morale ou la métaphysique, il n'en va pas de même avec l'œuvre du grand systématicien de la théologie platonicienne que fut Jamblique. Malgré des références à des mythes spécifiques, souvent hâtivement interprétés[14], il n'y a rien dans ce qui survit de l'œuvre de ce grand réformateur du platonisme dont on pourrait tirer une théorie du mythe. On sait pourtant que, sur bien des points, Jamblique avança sur les traces de ses deux prédécesseurs, tout en négligeant de reconnaître sa dette pour des

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11. Cf. E. DES PLACES (éd., trad.), *Numénius, Fragments*, Paris 1973, fr. 1a, où il est dit que la philosophie de Platon doit être associée non seulement à celle de Pythagore, mais aussi et surtout qu'elle doit être contemplée à la lumière de la sagesse orientale, consistant en dogmes et en rites des « peuples de renom », tels les Indiens, les Perses, les Juifs et les Égyptiens.

12. Pour une analyse du texte comme transmis par Porphyre, voir F. BUFFIÈRE, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*, Paris 1956, p. 413-459, qui se prononce pour la provenance numénienne de l'exégèse. Sur la synthèse insolite de différents éléments de l'interprétation de Numénius, voir P. ATHANASSIADI, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif*, Paris 2006, *p.* 82-83.

13. Voir, par exemple, *Enn.* V 1 [10], 7, 30-35 ; 8 [31], 13, 1-11 et IV 3 [27], 12.1-4, trois passages qui allégorisent la théorie des trois hypostases plotiniennes en se référant aux mythes des trois règnes divins, ceux de Cronos, de Zeus et de Dionysos. Cf. son traitement du mythe de Narcisse que Plotin interprète dans un esprit moralisant : *Enn.* I, 6 [1], 8, 8-16.

14. *De myst.* III 20, 148, 14-15 (avec référence à Platon, *Rép.* 621a) ; *In Phaedr.*, fr. 7 Dillon (avec référence à Platon, *Phèdre* 262d).

raisons qu'il serait trop long d'exposer ici[15]. Quoi qu'il en soit, au sujet du mythe et de son exégèse, Jamblique reste un interlocuteur sinon muet du moins peu loquace. Par contre, dans la figure de son petit-fils spirituel, l'empereur Julien, on rencontre un auteur extrêmement polygraphe qui avoue qu'il puise tout le fond théorique de sa pensée dans l'œuvre de Jamblique.

I. L'empereur Julien

Penseur peu original en matière de philosophie, Julien se distingue pourtant par l'ardeur de ses enthousiasmes et de ses loyautés, par son acharnement au travail en vue de buts précis et, aussi, par son habileté à programmer et à mettre ses projets en pratique. Loin d'être un rêveur coupé de son milieu historique, il fut un homme solidement intégré dans son époque, aux choix peu insolites. Bon élève, il est à son tour un maître dévoué à sa mission éducatrice ; qui plus est, c'est un chef politique qui a su faire usage de sa veine didactique. Ayant acquis la conviction que les mêmes dieux qui, à un moment critique de l'histoire de l'humanité, avaient envoyé Jamblique au monde pour prêcher le salut universel, l'avaient choisi comme leur agent, il se donne le rôle de l'apôtre du message jamblichéen. Il met au service de cet objectif tous ses talents, mais aussi les vastes possibilités dont il dispose, en tant que détenteur des pouvoirs temporel et spirituel du monde romain.

Si Julien s'efforce de formuler une théorie globale du mythe c'est pour répondre tant à la propagande chrétienne qu'à la polémique païenne. Depuis longtemps déjà, les Apologètes s'évertuaient à écrire sur l'obscénité et l'absurdité des mythes grecs[16] ; et cette critique, malveillante et sournoise, qu'exerçaient encore à l'époque de Julien les Pères de l'Église trouvait des alliés, involontaires sans doute, parmi les rangs des païens dont beaucoup traitaient leur propre théologie, exprès ou sans s'en rendre compte, de manière également irrévérente[17]. C'est contre ce double front que Julien dirige son offensive. Mais sa démarche n'est pas purement apologétique, car elle n'est pas uniquement inspirée par un esprit d'émulation. Elle comporte aussi un volet spontanément créatif qui, lui, reflète une évolution interne du paganisme. Face à une mythologie et à une histoire chrétiennes touchant tous les aspects de la vie sociale, intellectuelle et spirituelle, Julien construit un système dont la pertinence dans tous ces domaines est évidente : la nouvelle mythologie, constituée par le dialogue de plusieurs générations entre le génie populaire et la pensée philosophique, trouve en la personne de l'empereur un habile propagandiste.

L'occasion pour lancer son credo sur la fonction multiforme, voire holistique, du mythe fut fournie à Julien par la conférence d'un philosophe cynique, Héracleios, qui était venu étaler, devant l'empereur et les intellectuels de son cer-

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15. Pour une analyse de ces raisons, voir P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte*, *op. cit.*, p. 91, 145-150.

16. Un des exposés les plus systématiques de la mythologie mystérique grecque se trouve dans le *Protreptique* (II 12-22) de Clément d'Alexandrie.

17. La *Préparation évangélique* d'Eusèbe abonde en exemples de pareils traitements du mythe par les païens. Un bon exemple de critique involontaire envers la religion païenne est fourni par Porphyre. Repéré et dénoncé par Jamblique, le commentaire anti-païen de Porphyre est dûment exploité par Eusèbe : cf. Porphyre *ap.* Eusèbe, *Praep. év.* V 10, Jamblique, *De myst.* II 11, p. 95, 15-96, 1, ainsi que P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

cle, sa science aux dépens de celui-ci. Adaptant à ses besoins un mythe rendu célèbre par Prodicos, comme le lui signale ironiquement Julien (226d), le cynique itinérant avait fabriqué une allégorie dont le but était de faire la leçon à Julien sur l'art de gouverner. Héraclès et Dionysos y étaient ridiculisés et le reste des dieux (dont Zeus, incarnant Héracleios, et Pan, dans le rôle de l'empereur-apprenti) blasphémés. (208b, 234d-235a et 204d). Hors de lui-même d'avoir subi cet affront, Julien répondit sur le champ au cynique insolent par une attaque que l'on doit situer dans le cadre général de sa polémique anti-chrétienne (*Or.* VII 204a-239c). Ainsi, le manque élémentaire d'éducation du cynique, aboutissant au rejet de toute culture traditionnelle, à commencer par celle de sa propre école, est présenté par Julien comme le trait le plus marquant d'un « âge de fer » (205a), qui cultive l'ignorance et l'impiété. Après ce constat liminal, Julien commence à aborder, un par un, les points soulevés par le cynique, bâtissant une théorie étagée du mythe en tant que genre littéraire : ses différents échelons correspondent aux différents niveaux de l'évolution intellectuelle et spirituelle d'un être humain. Selon cette gamme, au premier niveau appartiennent les contes des nourrices, agréables et simples histoires, inventées pour intégrer l'enfant dans son milieu culturel tout en l'amusant et en lui faisant oublier ses douleurs (206d). Entre cette mythographie pour enfants et le travail du poète, éducateur du genre humain, Julien voit une flagrante analogie :

> Ainsi font les mythographes en apercevant la petite âme aux ailes naissantes désirer d'en savoir davantage, elle qui n'est pas encore capable de s'instruire de la vérité. Ils l'amènent vers le vrai par une dérivation, comme on irrigue un guéret altéré, pour soulager son picotement et sa souffrance (206cd).

Pour instruire les hommes et les mener, par la voie du divertissement (ψυχαγωγία), vers la vérité, les poètes se servent de la séduction du mythe.

Énumérant par la suite les parties de la philosophie, Julien conclut que la mythographie convient seulement à deux de ses départements : la morale appliquée à l'individu et la théologie (216b), qui correspondent à deux étapes successives dans le voyage du retour de l'âme vers sa source. Grâce au tissu des mythes qui s'imbriquent de façon si artistique pour former la culture grecque, l'âme s'initie doucement à l'éthique et à la métaphysique. C'est dans ce contexte que Julien tranche entre les deux types de mythe – éducateur (παιδευτικός) et initiatique (τελεστικός). Les premiers forment l'homme comme entité morale, et, pour cette raison, ils doivent être simples et à la portée de tous, se distinguant par la clarté et la gravité de leur style ainsi que par la pureté de leur langage. Antisthène, Xénophon et même Platon lui-même, se sont servis justement de ce type de mythe, dont la limpidité d'exposition ne cache aucun double sens (223a), pour traiter des sujets éthiques (217a). En revanche, le mythe initiatique, qui a le pouvoir à lui seul de révéler à l'homme sa nature divine, a quelque chose de secret, voire mystérique. Bref, si le mot clé du mythe moralisant est la gravité (τὸ σεμνὸν), celui qui caractérise le mythe initiatique est τὸ ἀπεμφαῖνον, l'obscur et le paradoxal.

C'est à ce point que Julien introduit Jamblique. Tout ce qu'il dira au sujet du mythe sacré est tiré de l'enseignement de ce maître, révéré par son impérial disciple à l'égal de Platon et d'Aristote (217b). Jamblique donc :

> Parle non de tous les mythes, mais des mythes initiatiques que nous a transmis Orphée, le fondateur des initiations les plus sacrées. Car c'est l'élément invraisemblable dans le mythe qui fraie la voie vers la vérité : plus l'énigme est paradoxale

> et monstrueuse, plus elle nous invite à ne pas prêter foi à ce qu'elle dit, et nous exhorte à explorer ce qui y est caché ; car elle nous engage à ne pas abandonner la recherche avant que, sous la conduite des dieux, ce qui est caché ne soit révélé pour initier – ou plutôt pour parfaire – notre intellect (νοῦς), voire ce qu'il y a en nous de supérieur à l'intellect même, cette parcelle de l'Un et du Bien, qui possède le Tout de manière indivisible, ce plérôme de l'âme qui, grâce à la présence, supérieure, distincte et transcendante, de l'Un et du Bien se rassemble dans Celui-ci (217cd).

Selon l'enseignement de Jamblique, dont Julien devient ici le porte-parole et l'exégète, pour être imbibés d'énergie surnaturelle, les mythes télestiques fonctionnent à l'égard de leurs auditeurs et lecteurs comme des instruments de passage du devenir à l'être, de l'état d'homme physique à celui d'homme spirituel. Comme les caractères sacrés et les noms barbares, qui ont le pouvoir mystérieux de guérir, non seulement les âmes mais les corps aussi, et de produire des épiphanies des êtres divins (216c), la nature indicible d'un mythe initiatique peut convertir celui qui l'entend ou le répète à la vie de l'esprit, à son insu même. Si la personne, qui a ainsi reçu ce don des dieux persévère dans la voie ouverte devant elle par l'action du mythe, ses efforts seront sûrement compensés par la révélation que la vérité spirituelle qu'elle cherche est logée dans son for intérieur, qu'elle est à découvrir par sa propre énergie spirituelle. Voilà ce qu'explique Julien dans un texte contemporain (et complémentaire) du discours *À Héracleios*, l'*Hymne à la mère des dieux* (170bc), où il allégorise le mythe central des mystères de la Magna Mater (*Or.* VIII 158d-180c). Malgré son titre, ce texte se concentre sur le dieu intellectuel Attis, érigé en symbole de la condition humaine : dans l'exégèse de Julien, les tribulations du berger phrygien renvoient aux péripéties de l'âme humaine, depuis sa chute dans le monde sensuel jusqu'à son retour à la source universelle, représentée par Cybèle.

Ayant habilement préparé son terrain, l'impérial théologien donne dans sa réponse à Héracleios deux exemples de mythes initiatiques – l'un concernant l'épiphanie de Dionysos, l'autre appartenant au cycle d'Héraclès – qui illustrent de manière emblématique les trois thèmes majeurs lancés par la nouvelle mythologie : premièrement, l'unité diachronique et synchronique de la théologie de l'hellénisme soudée par le mythe ; deuxièmement, l'antériorité absolue et globale de la mythologie grecque par rapport à l'histoire judéo-chrétienne ; et finalement, la centralité de la théurgie dans le domaine de la spiritualité. Si, pour prêcher son message, Julien choisit Dionysos et Héraclès c'est pour différentes raisons, à commencer par le fait qu'on les retrouve à la tête de la liste « des dieux terrestres » d'Evhémère[18] ; également, il s'agit de deux divinités qui avaient été bafouées par Héracleios dans son allégorie. Or, comme nous l'avons déjà signalé, Julien répond point par point à son adversaire et se montre particulièrement heureux de pouvoir lui faire la leçon sur la philosophie dont il se proclame l'adepte, à savoir le cynisme.

À la fois patron des philosophes cyniques et dieu de la victoire, introduit à Rome par un groupe de pythagoriciens, Héraclès est aussi un héros de la spiritualité, comme ne le suggère que trop le vocabulaire tiré des *Oracles chaldaïques* dont Julien se sert pour décrire et analyser son rôle de « second dieu » dans la

18. Diodore, VI 1.2.

nomenclature divine fixée par Jamblique. Aidé à tout moment par Athéna-Pronoia – la protectrice spéciale de Julien lui-même – Héraclès a comme fonction de sauver, en l'initiant aux mystères de l'au-delà, l'œcoumène tout entier et, à ce compte, il apparaît comme un double éternel du monarque régnant. L'épisode que Julien analyse dans sa réfutation des propos du cynique se réfère à un détail du cycle mythique d'Héraclès qui associe le héros au dieu suprême du panthéon julien, Hélios, tout en l'identifiant avec l'autre patron divin de l'empereur, Mithra. Tout comme Mithra, Héraclès traverse l'océan sur la coupe d'or prêtée par Hélios, pour aller établir l'ordre sur terre, un ordre que les Chrétiens s'évertuent à renverser. C'est dans ce contexte que Julien introduit cette remarque hardie : « quant à moi je ne crois pas, les dieux m'en soient témoins, qu'il traversa la mer sur une coupe d'or, mais qu'il marcha sur l'eau comme si elle était de la terre ferme » (219d).

Les références à la vie de Jésus deviennent plus nombreuses et plus pointues dans le traitement, beaucoup plus détaillé, que Julien réserve au mythe de Dionysos. Dieu « à la fois caché et manifeste » (221d), Dionysos fut incarné pour le salut des hommes. Sa « naissance incréée » (221c), « qui n'était point une naissance mais une manifestation divine » (220ab) avait été annoncée au monde par une prophétesse instruite dans les choses divines, la phénicienne Sémélé (220d et 221b). De toutes les tribulations auxquelles fut sujet le Rédempteur après son incarnation, Julien mentionne ici seulement la folie dont il fut frappé par Héra pour en être guéri ensuite par l'intervention de la Mère des dieux. Selon la version traditionnelle du mythe, c'est Héra elle-même qui revient sur son action pour assurer le salut de Dionysos. Or, en attribuant la guérison à Cybèle, l'interprétation de Julien suggère l'association de Dionysos avec un autre « second dieu » de l'hellénisme, lui aussi sauvé de sa folie par la Mère des dieux, Attis, « créateur immédiat du monde matériel » (175a) et symbole vivant de la révolution du Soleil, mais aussi, comme nous venons de le dire, modèle de l'homme dans sa lutte spirituelle. Dans la pyramide théologique de l'hellénisme dressée par Jamblique, les dieux intellectuels sont indissolublement liés entre eux par leur fonction de médiateurs entre le monde transcendant et le monde sensible dont ils ont la charge. Mais leurs personnalités ainsi que la modalité de leur ascension spirituelle varient selon les cas.

C'est ainsi que, tandis qu'Héraclès était devenu dieu grâce à sa vertu, Dionysos avait atteint son statut divin « par la théurgie » (219b). En opposant la voie de la morale à celle de la métaphysique comme canaux distincts, mais également aptes à mener l'homme au salut, Julien illustre le double caractère du mythe ; qu'il soit *paideutikos* ou *telestikos* – éducatif ou initiatique – le mythe grec appartient au domaine de la théologie, son rôle étant de parfaire l'âme de l'auditeur. Sa nature, que détermine sa fin, ne varie pas selon le lieu et le temps et, par conséquent, il ne se prête pas à des interprétations historiques. Par contre, les allégories dont le but est « de redresser les mœurs » au niveau individuel ou collectif, ou encore de faire passer un message social ou politique, ont un caractère partial et éphémère (223a). Voilà le genre littéraire dans lequel aurait dû s'exercer Héracleios. Pour l'instruire à ce sujet, Julien se voit contraint de créer un mythe à valeur purement politique fondé sur « une histoire vraie » (227b et 234c).

Le mythe autobiographique de Julien (227c-234c) constitue un sujet d'intérêt autant pour le psychologue que pour le spécialiste en philosophie politique. C'est un manifeste par lequel son auteur avance une philosophie « césaropapiste » du pouvoir, tout en proclamant sa conviction d'être appelé par Dieu à exercer ce

pouvoir à un moment particulièrement critique de l'histoire humaine[19]. Ce genre d'allégorie politique au service d'une réalité sociale était cher à Julien. La satire des *Césars* qu'il composa à Antioche, alors qu'il s'apprêtait à envahir la Perse, appartient au même type de mythographie et sert également le même but didactique : transmettre une vision historique fondée sur la notion de dynastie, entendue comme force métaphysique dans la hiérarchie divine, et annoncer à ses contemporains et à la postérité un programme d'action et se justifier face à eux. Voilà les objectifs de cet autre « mythe politique », créé par Julien.

S'il fallait, pourtant, mettre le doigt sur un élément traversant les différentes formes du mythe selon Julien, on s'arrêterait à la notion d'endoctrinement, concept crucial non seulement dans sa propre *Weltanschauung*, mais aussi et surtout dans la façon de penser et d'agir de toute l'époque. Le mythe, comme moyen d'instruction morale et politique ou comme instrument de conversion spirituelle, est pertinent à tous les aspects de la vie ; en fait, sans le mythe, il n'y a ni intégration dans le tissu social ni salut métaphysique.

II. Proclus

Si Julien, suivant Jamblique, mais aussi répondant à sa mission d'homme d'État et à l'esprit de son siècle, a articulé une théorie du mythe couvrant tout le spectre de l'activité humaine, la pensée platonicienne après lui, s'inspirant d'autres préoccupations, a à la fois rétréci et systématisé son schéma. Julien n'avait point effleuré le dangereux thème de l'indécence des mythes concernant les dieux chez Homère, sur laquelle Platon fonde la répudiation des poètes de son État idéal. Un effort systématique dans cette direction fut entrepris, au v^e^ siècle, par le successeur de Platon à l'Académie refondue d'Athènes, Syrianus. Dans un traité en sept livres, intitulé *Solutions des problèmes homériques*, Syrianus offrait une exégèse mystique des mythes scabreux d'Homère, alignant ainsi sa théologie sur celle du nouveau Platon[20]. Si cet ouvrage n'a pas survécu dans son intégralité, nous en avons du moins un exposé fidèle dans la dissertation que l'élève et successeur de Syrianus à l'Académie, Proclus, a consacré au même sujet dans le cadre plus général de son *Commentaire sur la République* de Platon[21].

Comme ce long dialogue ne faisait pas partie du programme d'enseignement de douze dialogues platoniciens fixé par Jamblique, son exégète était libre de ne pas suivre, selon la règle de la συνανάγνωσις, le texte original phrase à phrase, mais de sélectionner seulement pour les commenter les thèmes qui l'intéressaient. C'est justement ce que fit Proclus ; il s'arrêta sur des problèmes spécifiques, dont celui de la dualité du mythe – tant dans la tradition grecque que dans la vision platonicienne – pour y réfléchir à son aise et en offrir sa propre réponse. Ayant

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19. Voir mon analyse de ce texte dans *Julian : an Intellectual Biography*, Londres 1992², p. 172-175.

20. Signalons à cette occasion que, outre un ouvrage indépendant sur les dieux d'Homère, Syrianus composa aussi un traité sur l'accord d'Orphée, de Pythagore et de Platon avec les Oracles chaldaïques (*Souda*, IV 478, 21 ; 479, 2). Sur l'Homère du platonisme tardif, voir l'ouvrage, désormais classique, de R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian : Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley 1986.

21. Sur la dépendance de Proclus à Syrianus, voir *infra* n. 23.

formulé un questionnaire de dix articles et dressé, par la suite, un plan de recherche méticuleux (I, 42-69), Proclus se décida à présenter le résultat de cette vaste et minutieuse enquête (παμπόλλη ἐξέτασις : I 70, 17) sous la forme d'une « leçon d'apparat »[22], qu'il donna à l'occasion solennelle de l'anniversaire de Platon; il s'agissait de :

> défendre convenablement Homère contre le Socrate de la République et montrer qu'Homère donne sur les choses divines et sur les choses humaines les enseignements les mieux en accord et avec la nature des choses et avec les dogmes les plus chers au philosophe lui-même (*In Remp.* I 69, 24-70, 3).

Une seconde démarche, beaucoup plus difficile, consisterait à :

> purger Platon de sa contradiction avec lui-même et faire voir que cette opposition entre ce qu'il a écrit à la louange d'Homère et ce qu'il a déclaré quand il l'accuse, dérive d'une même vision scientifique, d'une même intuition intellective, d'un même merveilleux dessein (*In Remp.* I 70, 3-7).

Marchant sur les traces de son maître vénéré, comme il le déclare à chaque occasion[23], Proclus conçoit la conférence dans sa totalité comme un tribut d'hommage à la mémoire de Syrianus, dont il avait jadis suivi les cours sur le même sujet en compagnie de ses chers auditeurs, qui sont spécialement priés de ne point révéler à la foule l'enseignement mystique sur l'essence du mythe (*In Remp.* I, 205, 21-23). La différence entre l'entreprise de prosélytisme de Julien, qui voulait convertir à l'hellénisme un aussi grand nombre que possible, et l'esprit de chapelle qui anime le cercle de Proclus est patente. Dans l'un et l'autre cas l'on s'arrête devant l'indicible, mais, en bon vulgarisateur, Julien provoque son public pour se rétracter au tout dernier moment, ayant attisé la curiosité du lecteur (222c, 172d); en revanche, Proclus avance d'un pas sobre et régulier, se refusant à tout stratagème rhétorique et coup de théâtre; son objectif n'est pas de s'attirer des clients, mais de former des disciples dignes de la tradition qu'il représente. Analogue à la variété du public envisagé par l'un et l'autre auteur est la différence de style qui marque leur présentation : au traitement *ad hoc* de l'homme d'État (qui, par nécessité – mais par tempérament aussi – n'avait pas le temps de développer sa pensée de façon méthodique), correspond la manière exhaustivement analytique du professeur. Tout cela cependant est secondaire, appartenant au domaine de la forme plutôt qu'à celui de l'essence, où les deux hommes sont en principe d'accord, avec cette différence cardinale que, dans son rôle d'éducateur universel et de réformateur religieux, Julien a une vision « progressiste » du mythe, dont la partie moralisante débouche naturellement dans la partie initiatique, tandis que Proclus voit les deux types des mythes comme indépendants.

Étayant méthodiquement son argument et employant, par comparaison avec Julien, un vocabulaire à la fois plus technique et plus explicite quant à la théologie de l'école, Proclus pose le problème du désaccord de Platon avec lui-même au sujet

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22. A. J. Festugière, *Proclus : Commentaire sur la République*, t. I ("Dissertations" 1-6), Paris 1970, p. 8. Pour la plupart, les traductions de Proclus dans le texte suivent la version de Festugière, avec de légers amendements.

23. Proclus, I 71, 2-7; 95, 27-31; 115, 27-29; 133, 5-15; 152, 7; 153, 3, G. Kroll (éd.), *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Rempublicam commentarii*, Leipzig 1899; en effet, tout le traité de Proclus est « un hommage à la mémoire de son maître [Syrianus] », cf. 204, 21-23.

d'Homère (*In Remp.* I 70, 17-8 ; 71,2). « Divin poète » selon le *Phèdre* (95a *sq.*), « troisième à partir de la vérité », selon la *République* (597e), l'écart entre ces deux assertions paraît infranchissable, car :

> la première fait voir un Homère qui a dépassé dans son activité poétique toute doctrine humaine et partielle et qui a fixé sa pensée dans le divin en soi, l'autre un Homère en contact avec des semblances du réel, divagant loin de toute connaissance scientifique sur les dieux (*In Remp.* I 70, 24-28).

Or Proclus se met à réconcilier Platon non seulement avec Homère, mais aussi avec lui-même. Mais pour résoudre la contradiction apparente, il lui faut définir le genre littéraire du mythe, qu'il divise, se servant de la même typologie que Julien, en deux grandes catégories selon la forme, le contenu et, surtout, le dessein ou but (προαίρεσις) de chacune. C'est ainsi qu'il nous invite à mettre à part :

> d'un côté les mythes dits éducatifs, et de l'autre ceux qui sont plus divinement inspirés et qui ont regard au Tout plus qu'à la disposition d'âme des auditeurs. Ensuite il faut distinguer entre les vies de ceux qui en font usage, poser les unes comme juvéniles et nourries encore dans les mœurs tendres du jeune âge, les autres comme capables d'être éveillées vers l'intellect (νοῦς) et vers toutes les classes divines, vers les processions des dieux à travers l'univers, vers les « chaînes » et leurs extrémités qui cherchent à s'étendre jusqu'aux êtres du plus bas degré. Quand donc nous aurons séparé de cette façon les unes des autres les formes des mythes et les dispositions de ceux qui les reçoivent, donnons notre assentiment à ceux qui disent que les mythes composés par Homère et Hésiode ne contribuent pas à l'éducation et qu'il ne convient pas aux jeunes de les entendre, mais ajoutons aussi que ces mythes sont conséquents à la nature de l'ensemble des choses et à l'ordre des êtres et qu'ils lient ceux qui peuvent s'élever à la contemplation des réalités divines aux êtres mêmes réellement existants (*In Remp.* I 76, 24-77, 12).

Définis comme « plus divins » (ἐνθεαστικώτεροι), les mythes initiatiques dont parlait Julien sont opposés aux mythes éducatifs (παιδευτικοί), destinés à former les mœurs. Les premiers procurent l'union avec le divin et par là même ils s'adressent à une toute petite élite (ἐλαχίστοις), les seconds préparent à la vertu morale, édifiant la grande masse d'entre nous (*In Remp.* I 81, 12-21), et ainsi répondent au dessein de Platon dans la *République* qui n'était autre que de créer un système éducatif. S'il avait exclu de ce système la poésie, avec ses charmes équivoques, c'était justement pour ne pas « faire de nos garçons des gens épris des larmes ou des rires » (*In Remp.* I 50, 26-27)[24], mais, au contraire, les mener droit à la vertu, sous la tutelle « d'une Muse sévère » (*In Remp.* I 47, 6-7). À la fin de sa conférence, Proclus reviendra à ce sujet pour disculper Platon de toute disposition ennemie envers Homère ; s'il a banni la poésie de sa République :

> c'est qu'il voyait le vulgaire captivé par l'imitation et regardant les poètes comme savants en toute chose [...]. Dès lors, pour éduquer la foule, pour la corriger de son illusion déraisonnable, pour l'exhorter à la vie philosophique, non seulement il a prouvé que les Tragiques – ces prétendus éducateurs publics aux yeux de leurs contemporains – n'ont fait aucune observation de bon aloi, mais encore il s'est relâ-

24. Il ne serait pas tout à fait impertinent de se rappeler dans ce contexte des larmes que le jeune Augustin versait sur l'histoire de Didon et d'Énée et dont la force l'empêchait toujours de se sentir chrétien de tout son cœur.

> ché de son respect habituel pour Homère et, le mettant sur le même rang que les Tragiques, l'a censuré dans ses dialogues comme imitateur (*In Remp.* I 203, 28 – 204, 8).

Comme il découle de ce passage dans lequel Proclus récapitule son argument, la critique de la poésie faite par Socrate dans la *République* ne concerne pas simplement le contenu des mythes, mais les fondements mêmes de l'art poétique qui est condamné en sa qualité de démarche imitative : l'imitateur, qui prétend tout connaître sans rien savoir, « n'aura même pas une opinion saine eu égard à la beauté ou à la laideur des objets qu'il imite » (*Rép.* 602a et Proclus, *In Remp.* I 198, 6-7). Cédant à son adversaire ce point quant à la poésie tragique et comique, qu'il déclare « en son entier une imitation entreprise en vue de divertir les auditeurs » (*In Remp.* I 198, 9-11), Proclus consacre ses efforts à sauver la poésie épique de la mauvaise réputation que lui avait réservée Socrate. Mais réfuter, même à dix siècles de distance, un tel maître en dialectique n'est pas une tâche facile. Convaincu qu'Homère est un véritable théologien, Proclus se met à jouer avec mots et concepts pour répondre à l'accusation socratique. Selon son analyse, lors de leur traitement des mythes concernant le divin – mythes absolument inappropriés pour les oreilles des enfants et des adultes à l'esprit infantile – Homère et Hésiode pratiquent la règle de « l'imitation sans ressemblance » (ἀνόμοιος μίμησις), qui seule peut éveiller en nous la réminiscence de ce que l'âme a contemplé avant sa chute (*In Remp.* I 44, 17-18). Et pourquoi auraient-ils recours à ce stratagème ? Proclus fournit la réponse à cette question :

> Ayant vu que la Nature qui produit des images des formes immatérielles et intelligibles et qui orne ce monde visible des imitations variées de ces formes, représente l'indivisible par le divisé, l'éternel par le progressant dans le temps, l'intelligible par le sensible, l'immatériel par le matériel, ce qui n'a point de dimension par le spatial, et le fixe par le changeant, les pères créateurs du mythe imitent, conséquemment à la nature et à la progression des êtres dans leur apparition sous forme visible et figurative, la qualité suréminente des modèles en façonnant des copies du divin produites au moyen des expressions les plus opposées au divin et qui, en s'éloignant le plus, montrent par le contre-nature ce qui, dans les dieux dépasse la nature, par le contre-raison ce qui est plus divin que toute raison, par les objets présentés à nos yeux comme laids ce qui transcende toute beauté partielle ; et ainsi, ils nous font ressouvenir dans la mesure du possible de la suréminence transcendante des dieux (*In Remp.* I 77, 13-28).

Voilà le paradoxe, dont parlait Julien[25], analysé, expliqué et justifié en termes de théologie platonicienne : incapables de reproduire dans le monde du devenir les formes éternelles, mais aussi soucieux de protéger le regard des non initiés de la lumière aveuglante du métaphysique, les maîtres de la spiritualité suspendent des écrans devant nos yeux, qui par leur incongruité, laideur et obscénité patentes choquent la vue et mobilisent notre raison qui se met à chercher une explication de toutes ces turpitudes dans le sens opposé de ce qui se présente devant elle[26].

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25. Cf. 222c : « Chaque fois que les mythes relatifs aux vérités divines présentent une invraisemblance de pensée, ils nous crient sur le champs, pour ainsi dire, et protestent qu'il ne faut pas les prendre à la lettre, mais examiner et explorer leur sens caché ».

26. Cf. *In Remp.* I, 176, 6 *sq.*

Loin de s'agir « d'imitation », il s'agit, dans ce cas, de « symbolique », discipline qui embrasse la théologie et la mystique en leur fournissant une manière de s'exprimer. Elliptique plutôt qu'erroné, l'exposé de Socrate sur la poésie pourrait pourtant engendrer des malentendus au sujet d'Homère. Poursuivant son argument, Proclus se demande :

> Comment pourrait-on nommer « imitation » la poésie qui interprète les choses divines au moyen des symboles, étant donné que les symboles des réalités dont ils sont les symboles ne sont pas des imitations ? Car le contraire ne saurait jamais être une imitation de son contraire, l'obscène une imitation du beau, le contre-nature une imitation du conforme à la nature ! Or la doctrine symbolique indique la nature du réel par les oppositions même les plus fortes. Si donc un poète est possédé par la divinité et manifeste au moyen des signes la vérité sur les êtres, ou si, usant de science, il nous révèle l'ordre même des choses, ce poète-là ni n'est un imitateur ni ne peut être réfuté par les démonstrations sous nos yeux (*In Remp.* I 198, 13-24).

Comme la démarche de la théurgie est au-dessus des procédés rationnels de la pensée, de même les mythes homériques sont animés par « une harmonie qui ébranle les auditeurs et cause chez eux une fureur divine » (*In Remp.* I 84, 15-16). Dans l'un et l'autre cas, c'est le pouvoir des symboles qui a un effet salutaire sur l'âme de l'auditeur[27]. La théorie du pouvoir mystique des noms barbares, lancée par Jamblique, anime l'exposé de Proclus, comme celui de Julien, sur les mythes initiatiques, mais surtout elle se retrouve derrière certains passages emblématiques de la poésie d'Homère. Reproduisant l'interprétation « ésotérique » de Syrianus, Proclus nous informe que, lors de la préparation du bûcher de Patrocle :

> L'opération d'Achille dans son ensemble imite les procédés dont usent les théurges dans le rite de l'*apathanatismos* (immortalisation), élevant l'âme de Patrocle à la vie séparée. C'est pourquoi Achille est dit invoquer, debout devant le bûcher, les vents Borée et Zéphyre pour que le véhicule visible obtienne, grâce à leur mouvement apparent, le traitement approprié, en même temps que le véhicule plus divin soit secrètement purifié et restitué à son lot propre, attiré vers le haut par les rayons de l'air, de la lune et du soleil, comme le dit quelque part l'un des dieux[28]. En même temps Achille est montré verser des libations toute la nuit, « les tirant d'un cratère d'or avec une coupe à deux anses », « invoquant l'âme du malheureux Patrocle » (*Il.* XXIII 219, 221).
>
> C'est tout juste si le poète ne nous proclame pas que l'opération d'Achille concernait l'âme de son ami, et non pas seulement son apparence, que tous les rites à son compte avaient un sens symbolique, que le cratère d'or symbolisait la source des âmes, la libation, l'effluence qui de là-haut fait dériver à l'âme partielle le flot d'une vie supérieure, le bûcher, la pureté sans tache, capable de tirer l'âme du corps pour la conduire vers l'Invisible (*In Remp.* I 152, 9 – 153, 2).

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27. Jamblique, *De myst.* II 11, p. 96, 19 — 97, 1, à comparer avec Proclus, *In Remp.* I 48, 3-9 : « l'audition des paroles symboliques, qui conviennent à l'ensemble du culte divin, initie à elle seule à l'art hiératique, étant donné qu'à l'origine la vie des auditeurs a été solidement établie chez les dieux ; elle peut donc entendre désormais sans dommage les paroles de ce genre [...] qui font que l'inspiration divine descende sans obstacle jusqu'à nous ».

28. La référence est à l'Oracle chaldaïque 47, E. DES PLACES.

Pour arriver à une telle interprétation, on a dû passer par l'hypothèse, traitée en incontestable certitude par des générations successives de platoniciens, qu'Homère fut un proto-théurge. Et, à Homère théurge, correspond un Platon exégète. Reconnaissant le don divin du poète, le philosophe traduit en une prose rationnelle et lucide le discours inspiré. En effet,

> en beaucoup de lieux, ou plutôt partout pour ainsi dire, Platon adopte Homère, le traite en ami et l'appelle en témoignage de ses propres dogmes, tantôt avant les démonstrations, rapportant la vérité de ce qu'il va dire à la voix d'Homère comme à un oracle divin, tantôt après les démonstrations, prouvant que la rigueur scientifique de son argument est irréfutable, puisqu'elle s'accorde avec le jugement d'Homère, tantôt au milieu de ses discours sur les Êtres, référant à Homère l'origine de toute sa doctrine (*In Remp.* I 154, 16 – 155, 1).

Et avec une minutie digne de son talent de maître scolastique, Proclus parcourt nombre de dialogues platoniciens pour démontrer, par une surinterprétation des passages cités à cet effet, que « Platon pose le désaccord avec Homère comme équivalent aux choses absolument impossibles » (*In Remp.* I, 155, 21-22). En effet, comme l'avait déjà suggéré Syrianus, dans son rôle de scholiaste Platon ne s'est pas limité au seul développement des théories homériques – comme par exemple celle sur la nature des noms qu'il expose dans son *Cratyle*[29] –; il est allé jusqu'à emprunter à son aîné les matériaux de ses récits (157, 5-6) et à imiter l'économie de son discours[30]. Finalement, à l'instar de son prototype, Platon a créé des mythes, mais ces « mythes philosophiques », que Proclus range dans la catégorie de la mythographie moralisante (I 79), ont, contrairement aux mythes d'Homère dont le rôle est d'initier le lecteur aux mystères de l'au-delà, une fonction purement éducatrice.

III. Mythologie et écritures saintes de la secte platonicienne : généalogies spirituelles et communautés scripturaires

C'est tout à fait en passant que, dans son plaidoyer pour Homère, Proclus expose la véritable cause de son entreprise : Homère et Platon, nous dit-il, appartiennent à la même chaîne divine (*In Remp.* I 71). C'est à partir de cette présupposition et dans l'intérêt de sa défense que se construit la démonstration, d'une part de l'accord doctrinal entre les deux hommes (*In Remp.* I 71, 3-6), d'autre part de leur accord respectif avec la théologie des Oracles chaldaïques (*In Remp.* I 98, 26 – 99, 18). Avant d'aller plus loin, rappelons que la notion de hiérarchies célestes, initiées par un dieu et descendant, à travers toute une chaîne ontologique, jusqu'aux entrailles mêmes de la terre, constitue l'axe vertébral de la théologie platonicienne à l'époque de Proclus. Articulée par Jamblique et élaborée par ses descendants, qui ont enrichi cette structure métaphysique d'une forte dimension humaine, la théorie des chaînes qui s'entrecroisent est essentielle à la manière dont se pense et s'autodéfinit la communauté des platoniciens. Selon elle, la chaîne éternelle

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29. Voir l'analyse de ce point en *In Remp.* I 169, 25-170, 26.

30. Cf. *In Remp.* I 170, 27-171, 1 : « Pour démontrer de façon encore plus évidente l'amitié de Platon pour Homère, ne négligeons surtout pas le fait que, en bien d'endroits, il aspire aussi à imiter la manière dont Homère arrange ses sujets ».

est entrecoupée au niveau temporel par une chaîne historique dont les anneaux représentent tous ceux qui ont laissé un témoignage de la conscience qu'ils ont eue d'appartenir à la progression divine ; c'est cette diachronie, nommée « chaîne d'or », qui dote le groupe de son sens d'identité spirituelle[31].

Indissolublement liée avec Athènes selon la mythologie de l'école[32], la chaîne dynastique, au nom de laquelle pontifie Proclus, se propage dans le temps passé pour inclure Homère et Platon. Son patron divin est Hermès et chacun de ses membres a à un moment donné la révélation de son identité hermaïque. C'est ainsi que, grâce à une vision d'une grande vivacité, Proclus apprend un jour son appartenance à la chaîne de ce dieu, en même temps qu'un songe lui fait savoir qu'il porte l'âme du pythagoricien Nicomaque de Gérasa[33]. Les paramètres de son identité sont alors fixés : si sa généalogie divine est initiée par Hermès, sa généalogie humaine le place dans « la chaîne d'or », lui assignant comme ancêtres directs Pythagore, Platon et tous ceux qui, depuis l'aube des temps, avaient reçu la mission de commenter la parole divine cachée dans les mythes initiatiques[34].

S'étant appropriés la lignée pythagoricienne, ainsi que les poètes « théologiens », tels Orphée et Musée, Hésiode et Homère, les platoniciens de l'Antiquité tardive avaient, selon l'esprit de leur temps, fondé une communauté scripturaire dont l'écriture sacrée entre toutes était représentée par les Oracles chaldaïques. Or, tout ce qui précédait cette révélation de date récente, depuis Homère et Platon, faisait allusion, à travers le voile du mythe, à ses dogmes et ses pratiques cultuelles, de même que, dans leurs propos, les prophètes d'Israël ne faisaient autre chose qu'anticiper le Verbe. Et, dans cette démarche préparatoire à l'apparition de la vraie religion, la poésie d'Homère tenait, comme l'explique longuement Proclus, une place plus importante encore que la prose de Platon, puisque :

> ces mêmes enseignements sur les choses divines et humaines que nous donna Homère en inspiré des dieux et transporté de fureur par les Muses, Platon les a solidement établis par les méthodes irréfutables du raisonnement scientifique et les a rendus par ses démonstrations plus clairs à la plupart d'entre nous, qui avons besoin d'un tel secours aussi pour comprendre le réel (*In Remp.* I 159, 2-6).

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31. Sur l'idéologie de « la chaîne d'or » chez les platoniciens tardifs, voir dernièrement, P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-26 et 237-242.

32. Cf. Damascius, fr. 98E, P. Athanassiadi (éd., trad.), *The Philosophical History*, Athènes 1999.

33. Marinus, *Proclus ou sur le bonheur*, 28, 34-36, H. D. Saffrey, A.-Ph. Segonds (éd., trad.), *Marinus : Proclus, ou sur le Bonheur, texte établi, traduit et annoté*, Paris 2001.

34. Sur la chaîne d'or par rapport aux diadoques de l'Académie platonicienne d'Athènes, voir Damascius, *Hist. phil.*, 98C, 98E, 152, ainsi que fr. 6 et 13, spécifiant qu'Isidore appartient à la chaîne d'Hermès.

X

PHILOSOPHERS AND ORACLES : SHIFTS OF AUTHORITY IN LATE PAGANISM

Οὐχ ἧττον ὁ θεὸς φιλόσοφος ἢ μάντις
PLUTARCH, *The E at Delphi*

THE ANTONINE REVIVAL OF ORACLES

Oracles were the psychiatrists of the ancient world, and much more. When in distress, the individual had recourse to Apollo, the most popular of all divine seers, and usually went away with renewed confidence in the future. Throughout antiquity, from Delphi to Abonoteichos, consultation on private matters remained a normal oracular function. But the formulation of policy on the international level, which was so important — and so shady — an activity of oracles in Classical and Hellenistic times, ceased with the expansion of Rome eastwards. Henceforth Etruscan expertise and Sybilline ambiguity superseded Greek diplomacy, and the great public oracles in both Greece and Asia Minor entered a phase of decadence. As a priest of Apollo at Delphi in the early second century A.D. put it, "now that we enjoy peace and quiet and nothing terrible befalls our lives, it is natural that the questions to the god should be on trivial matters, not unlike the subjects of rhetorical declamations : should one marry, or embark on a journey, or make a loan? Likewise, the most important consultations on the part of cities concern the yield from crops, the increase of herds or public health" (1).

By the early second century people and oracles had become so pedestrian, that Plutarch went so far as to suspect a drying up of the supernatural. "We know of the recent exhaustion of mines, for example the silver-mines of Attica and the copper-ore in Euboea" (2) ; could not the prophetic current have run

(1) PLUTARCH, *Mor.*, 408bc, text slightly paraphrased.
(2) PLUTARCH, *Mor.*, 434a.

out in similar fashion, he asked using in support of his argument Aristotelian science and logic (3).

Yet Plutarch spoke too soon. For it was at about that time that the Indian summer of the Greek oracles set in. From the beginning of the second century to the middle of the third we witness an extraordinary flowering of oracular activity, especially in Asia Minor. Most of the great oracles were ancient foundations, like Claros and Didyma, which after a period of progressive decline re-emerged with a new *persona*. Through imperial munificence, work was resumed on their half-finished or dilapidated buildings, while both the number and type of people involved in the giving of oracles, and the manner of consultation were reformed (4).

But there were new oracles too. The second century saw the foundation of brand new establishments, the most notorious of which was the Oracle of Glycon at Abonoteichos on the Black Sea coast. It proved from the start a booming business, making as much as eighty thousand drachmas a year in a period in which the skilled labourer's monthly wages did not exceed twenty-five drachmas. The personnel of the oracle included servants, assistants, intelligence officers, writers of oracles, clerks, custodians of oracles, sealers and interpreters as well as propagandists travelling all-over the empire and singing the praises of the snake-god Glycon (5). As the oracle's fame spread, the founder, a Pythagorean by the name of Alexander, "applied to the emperor requesting to change the city's name from Abonoteichos to Ionopolis and to strike a new coin representing Glycon on the obverse and himself on the reverse, wearing the crown of his grand-father, Asclepius, and holding the scimitar of his maternal ancestor, Perseus" (6). The request was granted : the modern name of the site, Ineboli, is an obvious corruption of Ionopolis, while coins

(3) *Ibid.*, 434c.

(4) For Didyma, see my *The Fate of Oracles in Late Antiquity : Didyma and Delphi*, in *Delt. Christ. Arch. Et.*, 1989-90 (1991), pp. 271-274. For Claros, H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (1985), p. 146 and the vivid description in R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), pp. 171-180.

(5) Lucian, *Alex.*, 23-24, 37.

(6) *Ibid.*, 58, together with the comments of Lane Fox, *Pagans*, pp. 245-246.

with the representation of Glycon continued to be issued at least until the middle of the third century (7).

An efficient network linked Abonoteichos with Claros, Didyma and Mallos, to whom Alexander sent clients on a regular basis (8). Possibly the true measure of the success of these oracular establishments is the fury that their popularity induced in rationalists ; indeed if Oenomaus of Gadara and Lucian attacked them so venomously, the reason is that the Greek oracles had become policy-makers again, in a period in which religion formed one of the major concerns of politics (8a).

The Pythagorean sage

Hermeticism was not the only way in which the Greek and the Egyptian religious genius came together. The so-called Neopythagoreanism provides an equally representative expression of the Greco-Egyptian synthesis, and one which even in Ptolemaic times found many friends in the Italian peninsula, where, despite often vigorous opposition, it succeeded in establishing a Church (8b). If its fashion in Rome was short-lived, the main tenets of Pythagoreanism survived it by many centuries, lending force to the emerging Platonic religion. Foremost among these elements was the concept of the holy man, most strikingly exemplified in the third-century *Lives* of Pythagoras and other

(7) For coins, see B. V. Head, *Historia numorum ; a Manual of Greek Numismatics* (1911), p. 505 ; an exhaustive list (with commentary and plates) of monuments representing Glycon from the Pontus to Dacia and to Athens is to be found in L. Robert, *À travers l'Asie Mineure* (1980), pp. 393-412. For the importance of the cult see M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (1967-1974²), II, pp. 452-455 and 506. For its possible cultural transfer, see I. Kaygusuz, *Deux inscriptions de Gangra-Germanicopolis (Cankırı)*, dans *ZPE*, 49 (1982), p. 182, who recognises a survival of Glycon in a relief representing two snakes with a human head on the main gate of a Moslem hospital in Paphlagonia dating from 1235.

(8) Lucian, *Alex.*, 29.

(8a) According to Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*, IV, 2, 14, those who exposed the oracular fraud were countless (*μυρίοι*) ; for the truly formidable attack on oracles by the Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara, *ibid.*, V, 18 ff. ; VI, 7.

(8b) See, among others, M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Mystic Italy* (1927), *passim.*

saints (9). Equally important for future developments was the Pythagorean practice of interpreting in a mystical way not only the ancestral religious rites, but even all profane literature. This invasion of the field of culture by the supernatural was resisted in the high imperial times by Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans, but the adepts of a renovated Platonism launched frontal attacks against them, which resulted in their complete annihilation (10). Through the catalytic action of Numenius of Apamaea and of the Chaldaean Oracles the main metaphysical and methodological features of Pythagoreanism were absorbed by mystical Platonism, which proved the only viable philosophy in the centuries to come.

The centrality of the Chaldaean Oracles in the philosophical thought of late antiquity both symbolises and explains the new developments in prophetic activity, whether official or free-lance (11). This collection of fake oracles expounds a theological system in which divination is instrumental in bringing about the emancipation of the soul from the tyranny of the body and its ascent towards a transcendent fiery god (12). But this cannot happen without the constant guidance of a man endowed with both holiness and knowledge. The figure of the hierophant of the new times was meticulously described and to some extent typified by Iamblichus (13). The Syrian philosopher, who settled

(9) To the Pythagorean *Lives* by Porphyry and Iamblichus, add the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by PHILOSTRATUS and the *Life of Plotinus* by PORPHYRY (for the latter cf. the new translation with detailed commentary by P. KALLIGAS [Athens Academy, Manousis Library No. 1, 1991]). For the spread of Neopythagoreanism, see F. CUMONT, *Lux perpetua* (1949), pp. 149-156.

(10) According to the Catalogue of Lamprias, Plutarch devoted to anti-Epicurean and anti-Stoic polemic no less than nineteen works, a few of which are extant ; see also, CUMONT, *Lux perpetua*, pp. 138-141, and below, n. 19. On rationalist attack, cf. above n. 8a.

(11) On this huge topic see H. D. SAFFREY, *La théurgie comme pénétration d'éléments extra-rationnels dans la philosophie grecque tardive*, in *Τό ἑλλογο στοιχείο στην επιστημονική και στην εξωεπιστημονική περιοχή*, Acts of the Fourth International Humanistic Congress at Athens, 1978 (1981), pp. 153-169 ; also my forthcoming article, *Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination : the Testimony of Iamblichus*, *JRS* 83 (1993).

(12) IAMBLICHUS, *Myst.*, II, 11.

(13) For an analysis see my *Julian and Hellenism : an Intellectual Bio-*

in Apamaea, possibly because of the congenial ambience created there by his great predecessor Numenius, was the first important thinker to produce a detailed commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles ([14]). For the next three centuries the best minds of the age were to consider that reflection and commentary on this collection was their most important and at the same time their most difficult task ([15]). Through their efforts, Greek literature from Homer to Euripides became engulfed in the theology of the Oracles to re-emerge as sacred letters ([16]).

This development is paralleled and reflected in the history of the oracles. The Pythagorean philosopher who controlled the oracle of the new god Glycon at Abonoteichos was the founder both of mysteries and of a personal cult ([17]). Like most contemporary Pythagorean sages, he was a great performer — an exhibitionist and a charlatan, according to Lucian , who wore a wig and was not above showing on occasion a golden thigh ([18]). Just like Plutarch, his fellow priest at Delphi, Alexander waged open war against Epicureanism, as well as against Christianity ([19]), and in the various phases of this war, so far from being defeated by Lucian and those who thought like him, he succeeded in putting them to flight. Indeed it is not impossible that the disappearance of Epicureans from the philosophical scene by the fourth century, as testified by Julian, may have something to

graphy (1981), reprinted (with new introduction) as *Julian : an Intellectual Biography* (1992), pp. 181-183.

(14) Porphyry had already done so (cf. H. LEWY [ed. M. TARDIEU], *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* [1978²], pp. 449-456), but it was clearly under Iamblichus' influence that the Chaldaean Oracles became the Bible of paganism ; he had composed a *Χαλδαϊκὴ Θεολογία* in at least twenty-eight books (cf. DAMASCIUS, *Dub. et Sol.*, I, 86, 7 and MARINUS, *Procl.*, 26), which, according to J. DILLON (*Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos commentariorum fragmenta* [1973], p. 24), "must have been the *magnum opus* of [his] last period".

(15) See for instance, MARINUS, *Procl.*, 38.

(16) Thesis explicitly stated in Julian's Edict on Education, *ep.* 61 (BIDEZ).

(17) LUCIAN, *Alex.*, 38-40, 4-5 ; on Alexander's Pythagorean pedigree, see LANE FOX's pertinent remarks, *Pagans*, pp. 245-246 and 249.

(18) LUCIAN, *Alex.*, 40.

(19) *Ibid.*, 25, 38, 46-47 ; with Lucian this war took the aspect of a deadly vendetta, *ibid.*, 55-57.

do with the thoroughness with which Alexander carried out his task (20).

Towards a transcendental god : reform in cult and thinking

A statistical study of the surviving oracles from the second and third century allows two main concerns to emerge : the proclamation of henotheistic theology and the reform of cult. With slight differences in emphasis and methodology, this policy seems to have been carried out with great consistency, while an efficient system of diffusion was put at its service.

A certain Polites asked Apollo at Didyma what happens to the soul after death. The god replied :

> So long as the soul is imprisoned in the perishable body,
> Though impassible, she still yields to its pangs.
> But once released from its faded mortal frame,
> She quickly finds her way to the aether, where she dwells in her entirety
> Youthful for all eternity, altogether indestructible.
> Such is the decree of divine first-born providence (21).

This second-century oracle with its distinctly Pythagorean phrasing is known to us from Lactantius and from two collections of oracles, Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Tübingen Theosophy*, while it is echoed in the oracle uttered to a sceptical youth by the ghost of Apollonius of Tyana (22).

(20) Julian, *ep.* 89b, 301c. According to Lucian (*Alex.*, 47) : "One of the most ridiculous acts committed by Alexander was that having found the 'Main Doctrines' by Epicurus which, as you know, is the finest of his books containing a summary of the man's wisdom, he brought it into the middle of the market place and burned it on faggots of fig-wood as if he were burning the man himself : then he threw the ashes into the sea uttering this oracle : 'I command thee to burn with fire, creed of an old fool!'."

(21) Porphyry, *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*, ed. G. Wolff (1856), p. 178, and *Theosophia Tubingensis*, ed. H. Erbse (1941), § 37. For the dating and attribution to Didyma, see L. Robert, *Trois oracles de la théosophie et un prophète d'Apollon*, in *CRAI*, (1968), p. 590.

(22) On Apollonius' posthumous oracle on the immortality of the soul, Philostratus, *Apoll.*, VIII, 31.

The tremendous success of the Chaldaean Oracles may have inspired philosophers and theologians to try to use genuine oracles to support their theories. Collections of oracles which proved a point became fashionable among pagan philosophers in the third century, and the practice was carried out with renewed enthusiasm by the Christians for quite a few centuries afterwards ([23]). Thus a collection based heavily on Didymeian material was produced by Porphyry probably before the 260s ([24]). His *Philosophy from Oracles* was soon followed by the work of another Roman Platonist, Cornelius Labeo, who collected, and doubtless interpreted, prophecies of the Clarian Apollo. Until recently such collections were considered by scholars to be literary forgeries, but as more stones inscribed with oracles turn up in the cities of Asia Minor this view is being emended.

Volumes made up of authentic oracles and stressing the unity of the new theology clearly helped its propagation. It is even likely that in producing their collections men like Porphyry and Labeo did not act wholly spontaneously : they may well have responded to invitations to conduct research in the archives of the oracles and to help by a publication both to codify and to spread the new ideas. As their subsequent history and frequent quotation show, these collections enjoyed wide-spread circulation and were eagerly plundered by Christians, to whom they suggested the ingenious idea that they could be used, with the necessary adjustments, to prove that the Greek gods had foretold the birth of Christ and the triumph of Christianity. Such a work is the so-called *Tübingen Theosophy*, which as it turns out is one of the best pieces of evidence for wide belief among pagans in late antiquity in a transcendent solar God. Yet his nature so puzzles the average man that, from the Upper Nile to the Black Sea, he never tires of seeking the *ἄγνωστος θεός* :

(23) To the *Tübingen Theosophy* add S. Brock, *A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers*, in *OLP*, 14 (1983), pp. 203-246 ; Id., *Some Syriac Excerpts from Greek Collections of Pagan Prophecies*, in *Vig. Christ.*, 38 (1984), pp. 77-90 ; R. van den Broek, *Four Coptic Fragments of a Greek Theosophy*, in *Vig. Christ.*, 32 (1978), pp. 118-142. For an overview, G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire : Étude sur le recueil des Patria* (1984), pp. 127-159.

(24) For the date, J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (1913), pp. 19-20.

— Who are you?
— A new Asclepius! exclaims Alexander's snake-god.
— Different from the old one? What do you mean?
— You are not allowed to hear that.
— For how many years will you stay with us delivering oracles?
— One thousand and three.
— Then, where will you go?
— To Bactra and the surrounding region ; for the Barbarian too ought to profit from my presence among men.
— What about the other oracles? the one at Didyma, the one at Claros and the one at Delphi? Do they still have with them your father, Apollo, or are the prophecies given out by them false?
— This you should not wish to know either. It is not permitted!

This intimate chat continues until finally the consultant is informed that he will be re-incarnated as a camel ([25]). To Lucian's considerable distaste, this dialogue was inscribed in letters of gold on the house of the man who received it at Tios.

But on occasion the god delivering the oracle could be more straightforward and at the same time less omniscient than Alexander's snake. "The supreme god is superior to me", declared Apollo, "and ineffable" ([26]), while on another occasion he confessed : "Even I don't know him" ([27]).

Rather than distressing his enquirer in this manner, the Nubian Mandulis stepped into the shoes of the ineffable and graced his pilgrim with a vision. "Then I knew you, Mandulis, to be the Sun, the all-seeing master, the king of All, the pantokrator Aion" ([28]).

— Who is the supreme god? Apollo at Claros was asked.
— Name the supreme god Iaô.
In the winter call him Hades and Zeus as the spring sets in ;
Helios in the summer and in the autumn, gentle Iaô ([29]).

(25) Lucian, *Alex.*, 43.
(26) *Theos. Tub.*, § 34 ; cf. § 39.
(27) *Theos. Tub.*, § 12 ; cf. § 38.
(28) E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* (1969), no. 166 ; cf. A. D. Nock, *A Vision of Mandulis Aion*, in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (1972), pp. 357-400.
(29) Cornelius Labeo *ad* Macrobius, *Sat.*, I, 18, 20.

Whether Iaô is Yahwe or not is of no concern to us here. The really important message sent out by the flourishing shrines of late antiquity is that the plurality of traditional worship has to be superseded if man is to know God. By the end of the second century this philosophical tenet had been understood so well that men dared ask Apollo as insulting a question as the following : "Are *you*, or another, God?" Apollo's answer to this irreverent enquiry received such wide publicity by late antique media that even Christians memorised and immortalised it. It ran as follows :

> Born of himself, innately wise, motherless, immovable,
> Not contained in a name, many-named, dwelling in fire,
> That is God. We angels are but a particle of God ;
> To those who ask about God who he is
> Apollo has declared : the aether, God the all-seeing gazing on whom
> Pray at dawn looking towards the East.

This is only part of the oracle, but it is the part which was quoted on an inscription found recently at Oenoanda, a border-town between Lycia and Phrygia. Fuller versions are quoted by Lactantius and the *Theosophia Tubingensis* (30). According to Louis Robert, this oracle was sought by the authorities of Oenoanda and was subsequently carved on an altar-shaped relief on a block of stone in the city-wall (31).

Robert's argument was significantly weakened when it was realised that the altar is carved not over a gate, as he thought, but next to a door leading into a tower (32). And of course it would be a little odd if part only of an official oracle were inscribed by the city which sought it. From other sources we know that the oracle had been sought by a certain Theophilus, who presumably was not from Oenoanda since he is not named in the version inscribed there. Rather it will have been set up by Theophilus in his hometown — which may have been

(30) LACTANTIUS, *Inst.*, I, 7, 1 ; *Theos. Tub.*, § 13, 29 ff. For a fuller list of the oracle's literary quotation, see LANE FOX, *Pagans*, p. 171.

(31) L. ROBERT, *Un oracle gravé à Oinoanda*, in *CRAI* (1971), p. 614.

(32) A. S. HALL, *The Klarian Oracle at Oenoanda*, in *ZPE*, 32 (1978), pp. 263-267.

Miletos ([32a]) — and disseminated from there, finding also its way into some literary collection. It clearly enjoyed wide popularity and a soldier or some other individual connected with a mystical brotherhood at Oenoanda discovered it and had it carved on the Hellenistic wall at exactly the point which is first touched by the rays of the rising sun.

The angels of the oracle, among whom Apollo counts himself, belong to the theological koine of the period and it would be idle to attempt to identify them as of Jewish or Gnostic, Chaldaean or Platonic origin ([33]). It is only worth pointing out in this connection that by this demotion of the old pantheon and its identification with mere angels ([34]), philosophic monotheism could accommodate tradition. We possess a number of oracles from this period by which cities and individual priests enquire about the hierarchical position of gods and the honours due to them. The answers are consistent with the new theology ([35]). A more spiritualised form of piety than the one associated with blood sacrifices is demanded by the prophetic shrines : "I do not want hecatombs and golden colossi, but sweet songs" ([36]), proclaims the Didymaeus Apollo in the third century, while already a hundred years earlier a delegation from Cyzicus to the temple of Ammon in the desert of Siwa had been given a similar response ([37]).

These prescriptions of a "rational sacrifice" reproduced on stone in the cities of Asia Minor go hand in hand with contemporary Hermetic and Platonic teaching and practice ([38]). At the same

(32a) A certain Julius Theophilus was priest of the imperial cult at Miletus in the early third century and the son of a prophet of Apollo at Didyma. He can therefore plausibly be conjectured to be the man who asked Apollo whether he is the supreme god, causing the "Oenoanda oracle", which he was then in a position to diffuse (Lane Fox, *Pagans*, p. 193).

(33) For a discussion of their identity, see L. Robert, in *CRAI* (1971), pp. 613-614.

(34) Cf. *Theos. Tub.*, §§ 27-28.

(35) See L. Robert, in *CRAI* (1971), p. 608, n. 1.

(36) Rehm, *Did.*, II, 217.

(37) R. Merkelbach and E. Schwertheim, *Epigraphica Anatolica*, 2 (1983), pp. 147-154.

(38) *Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 31 ; XIII, 18, 19 and 21 ; Porphyry, *Plot.*, 10 ; and Iamblichus, *Myst.*, V, 14.

time they call our attention to one of the main concerns of contemporary paganism : the role of ritual and the place of tradition in religious life.

If Plotinus could afford to dismiss formal worship, Porphyry paid only lip-service to such an attitude. Occasionally he declared that "the mind of the sage alone is the temple of God in human societies" (39), but in actual practice he defended traditional paganism both by attacking Christianity and by interpreting the old practices in the light of new ideas. Accordingly he wrote a treatise *On Statues*, in which he showed that the worship of idols is an eminently symbolic act not unworthy of the philosopher. The defence of ritual is an even more pronounced theme in Cornelius Labeo for whom no form of religious folk-lore was negligible. He seems to have produced a meticulous commentary on Roman *fasti* and another one on the *Disciplina Etrusca*, which he forced out of its Italian provinciality into the open air of third century syncretism (40).

The prosopography of transcendence

If the vulgarisation of an ineffable god and the reform of traditional cult were the main concerns of the revived oracles of Roman Asia Minor, one may ask in whose interest it was to diffuse those particular ideas and practices, which raises the question of who was in control of the oracles at that period. The answer cannot be wholly satisfactory, as our prosopographical data are very fragmentary. But, generalising from the available evidence, we can say that the oracles at Didyma and Claros were run by the cultivated decurions of Miletos and Colophon respectively. These people were, at least into the mid-third century, rich, intellectually *au fait* to the extent of often being philosophically educated and, most importantly, pro-Roman in their politics. Plutarch exemplifies the *typos* admirably,

(39) Porphyry, *Marc.*, 11, cf. 19, an idea also propagated by contemporary divination, *Theol. Tub.*, § 30, etc.

(40) P. Mastandrea, *Un neoplatonico Latino, Cornelio Labeone* (1979), pp. 14-102.

while it is characteristic of the peculiar traditionalism of a Julian that he proclaimed himself prophet at Didyma ([41]).

The contribution of the conservative-minded elements among the Greek elites to political theorising in the Antonine period has been carefully mapped in recent years. These were men who looked back to the Republican values and saw the emperor in the light of a democratic ideology as a *princeps* rather than a *dominus*. But the role played by their progressive counterparts in the formulation of a new imperial theology (which in due course was taken over by Christian thinkers) has not yet been assessed. I would like to suggest that the solar theology propagated by the Asia Minor oracles was designed to prepare public opinion to accept the cults of *Sol Invictus Exsuperantissimus* as the Empire's official religion, and of the emperor as the earthly manifestation of the Sun.

The power of oracles to influence public opinion was fully recognised by emperors. In a recently published book, H. W. Parke has advanced, after Eric Birley, an attractive hypothesis concerning an inscription found at six widely scattered points in the Western part of the empire. The inscription, in Latin, runs : "to the gods and goddesses, in accordance with the interpretation of an/the oracle of the Clarian Apollo", and has been discovered at the Fort of Vercovicium in Hadrian's Wall, Corinium in Dalmatia, Nora in Sardinia, Cuicul in Numidia, and Volubilis in Mauretania ([41a]). Faced with such uniformity and wide diffusion, Parke assumed that the enquirer was a person in a position to publicise the oracle that he received all over the Empire. As the most likely candidate he advanced Caracalla, who can be plausibly conjectured to have visited Claros in 214. Caracalla's family background, education, personality and general policies as well as the frame of mind in which he was as he prepared for the Parthian War fit in with Parke's suggestion ([42]). Indeed Caracalla is a key figure in the development of Roman religious ideology and practice. His well attested Pythagorean-

(41) See my *Fate of Oracles* (as in n. 4), pp. 274-275.

(41a) Cf. M. Euzennat, *Une dédicace volubilitaine à l'Apollon de Claros*, in *Ant. Afr.*, 10 (1976), pp. 63-68.

(42) Parke, *Oracles*, pp. 160-162.

ism is explicitly at the root of his conception of politics and religion as an indivisible whole (43). This belief, which underlies the *Constitutio Antoniana*, as has recently been shown by K. Buraselis in a magisterial study (44), must have driven Caracalla to try to use the new oracular theology in which he shared as a means of achieving greater cohesion in his new, now formally universal, Empire. His example was strikingly followed by the Emperor Julian, who sought to circulate Apollinian oracles by means of encyclical letters to his new universal Church (45). By then of course, on Julian's own confession, the oracles had been silenced (46). One may ask why.

From God to Man

The economic crisis of the empire, which to some extent affected the well-to-do citizens of Asia Minor in the third century, must have made it harder for them fully to meet their onerous religious duties. The Gothic invasion on the other hand is not unconnected with the decline of specific sites, as for instance Didyma, a decline that was only briefly arrested at the turn of the third century when the oracle gave Diocletian the go-ahead for the Great Persecution (47). Finally environmental factors played their part in the process of decadence, as Miletos had already begun to suffer from the silting of the Maeander, and Claros was being gradually buried under the alluvial deposits of the river. But *why* did its prophets not fight this natural process? The beginnings of an answer to this question can be sought in a justly famous article, published more than twenty years ago :

(43) It is probably unnecessary to insist on this principle after the publication of S. R. F. Price's *Rituals and Power : the Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (1984), but what we owe to Caracalla is a qualitative change.

(44) K. Buraselis, *Θεία Δωρεά : μελέτες πάνω στην πολιτική τής δυναστείας τών Σεβήρων και την Constitutio Antoniniana* (with English summary) 1989, pp. 20-24 and 29-37.

(45) Julian, *ep.* 88, 451a ; *ep.* 89b, 297c-298a and 299cd.

(46) *Contra Galilaeos*, 198c.

(47) Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.*, 11, 6.

> The rise of the holy man has something to do with the silence of the oracles (...) Oracles remained active into the late classical period ; but they had already become too like their future rival. The holy man merely trumped the oracle by being both objective and trenchant in an idiom that was more consonant with the habits and expectations of a new, more intensely personal style of society ([48]).

Peter Brown's holy man is of course the rural saint of Syria and Mesopotamia who uttered his oracles concerning everyday problems or high politics in a language unintelligible to the majority of the educated men of late Roman society. The Christian holy man did inherit some of the functions and prerogatives of the oracle. But, long before he set about climbing his column, the locus of the divine had already shifted from oracles to a new type of holy man : the Pythagorean sage, who saw himself as the depository of the numinous and the apostle of redefined Greek culture. This transfer of prophetic power is conveyed by many a *vaticinium post eventum* in Philostratus' *Life* of the paradigmatic Pythagorean saint, Apollonius of Tyana :

> Several oracles circulated about him. Claros announced that Apollonius shared in its wisdom being the paradigmatic sage, while similar oracles were issued by Didyma and from the shrine at Pergamon, where the god urged those in need of health to betake themselves to Apollonius (IV, 1).

One need not doubt that here Philostratus is describing a contemporary situation. But the theoretical justification of the appropriation of the oracular function by the pagan saint was to come many decades later, in the pages of Iamblichus. In his discussion of the main tendencies of contemporary divination, the Syrian theologian says repeatedly that the prophetic spirit cannot be confined to one place only, but it is present in the whole cosmos being co-extensive with God and therefore in-

(48) Peter Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, in *JRS*, 61 (1971), pp. 99-100. B. M. Bokser, *Approaching Sacred space*, in *HTR*, 78 (1985), pp. 297-299, sees this tendency as instrumental in the development of Rabbinic Judaism.

herent in the divisible ([49]). Yet in order to become aware of the existence of the divine will in him and communicate it to others, Man must neutralise his self by the path of abstinence and knowledge ([50]). Only then does he become the repository of the numinous on earth.

This new axiom of hieratic Platonism — that there are no holy places but only holy individuals — became current coinage in the fourth century. The pupils and grand-pupils of Iamblichus disseminated it all over Asia Minor. These were men and women who enjoyed divine epiphanies without losing their self-control ([50a]). Hecate, the patron-goddess of the Chaldaean Oracles, or some other god, came at their call and supplied whatever information was required. At the same time they could interpret any oracle or divine sign without special preparation, for they had taken cognizance of their supernatural powers once and for all through their initiation in the mysteries of philosophy.

In the mid-fourth century the brilliant diplomat and philosopher Eustathius was visited in his Cappadocian home by a delegation of Greek sages who asked him why he had not yet come to Greece when so many oracles announced his imminent arrival. The oracles had been obtained by theurgical means in private ceremonies and interpreted on the spot, but only Eustathius' superior knowledge could provide the correct exegesis for them ; when all the signs were described to him, he exclaimed : "But these did not prophesy my visit!" ([51]). His wife, Sosipatra, could do even better. Not only did she utter prophecies while remaining sober — *σωφρόνως ἐνθουσιῶσα* —, but when she spoke "her words did not differ in anything from immovable oracles" ; then "everybody knew that Sosipatra was everywhere witnessing all

(49) IAMBLICHUS, *Myst.*, III, 1.

(50) *Ibid.*, III, 4, 5, 7, 11 and 31.

(50a) On divine epiphanies in late Roman paganism, see LANE FOX (*Pagans*, pp. 124-150) refuting A. D. NOCK's crude generalisations (*Essays*, p. 194) ; for all its subtlety though, L.F.'s analysis puts too much emphasis on continuity with the classical past, thus disregarding the crucial role played by the process of interpretation of the tradition, which inevitably results in change.

(51) EUNAPIUS, *V. Phil.*, VI, 6, 1-4.

that happens, as philosophers say about the gods" (52). When she passed away, Sosipatra's divinatory powers remained active in her son Antoninus, an ascetic who emigrated to Egypt and proved an even greater prophet than Iamblichus, on the testimony of their common biographer (53).

Just as in the old days then, when certain families had hereditary links with certain oracles, passing the prophetic prerogative from generation to generation, so now too *γένη προφητικά* — prophetic clans — began to emerge among the recognised proprietors of the numinous. This point was duly, if subtly, publicised by the Emperor Julian, adept and apostle of Iamblichan paganism (54).

Nor was the theurgical sage operating exclusively for the sake of his co-religionists ; his skill was recognised and used by his larger social milieu. In the early 360s the Christian rhetor Prohaeresius had recourse to the *ξένη σοφία* — the foreign wisdom — of the Eleusinian hierophant in order to find out for how long Julian's measures would be valid (55). Julian's own master, the notorious Maximus of Ephesus, was so universally revered on account of his oracular wisdom, that he was regarded as divine by Christians and pagans alike : when tried under Valens and condemned to death for having interpreted an oracle in connection with the fate of the emperor, none of the relevant officials dared enforce the verdict, since they knew that "in Maximus' body some

(52) *Ibid.*, VI, 9, 14.

(53) *Ibid.*, VI, 11, 11.

(54) For Chrysanthius' son, Aedeius, Eunapius writes (*V. Phil.*, XXIII, 5, 3-4) that "his kinship and familiarity with the divine was so unforced and unceremonious that he had only to place a garland on his head and turn his gaze towards the sun, and immediately he delivered oracles which were not only infaillible but also written according to the finest mode of divine inspiration. Yet he neither knew the art of writing verse nor was he trained in the science of grammar, but to him the god was everything" ; cf. Julian, *Or.*, XI, 131b-d.

(55) Eunapius, *V. Phil.*, X, 8, 1-2 ; the particular hierophant was an expert theurgist, *ibid.*, VII, 3, 7-9. A. Momigliano's remark that "when the famous Christian rhetorician Prohaeresius showed his ability to foretell future events, it was discreetly assumed that he had stolen his knowledge from the hierophant of Eleusis" (*Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians*, in G. J. Cuming and D. Baker (eds), *Popular Belief and Practice* [1972], p. 11) is too subtle and assumes an unnecessary social dichotomy.

god would be punished". They therefore summoned to Antioch Festus, the Proconsul of Asia "with the soul of a butcher", who had no such scruples. The story ends on a loud moral note : when under Theodosius, Festus succeeded in regaining his position, he gave a banquet at which he described how in a dream the long-dead Maximus dragged him to Hades. At the urging of his friends, he left the table and betook himself to the temple of Nemesis where he offered a prayer to the goddesses of Justice and Revenge. No sooner had he finished praying than he slipped and was instantly killed ([56]).

Such stories did not form the exclusive repertory of pagan hagiographers. They enjoyed wide circulation and were instrumental in causing conversions from Christianity to paganism ([57]).

Yet for all his universal recognition as an oracle, the pagan saint was felt by society to be increasingly irrelevant to its preoccupations. His main concern was the fate of paganism. Having taken over from the oracles the function of defining cult and regularising ritual, he had invested himself both with the air and the name of hierophant ([58]). He was engrossed in the evolution of a pagan liturgy composed mainly of god-sent hymns, in attacking Christianity and heretical Platonism, and in the allegorical interpretation of traditional culture. As this culture dwindled, his prophecies took on an increasingly Cassandran flavour, and he himself became even more peculiar and distant from his fellow-men. The pilgrims who sought Antoninus in his Canobian retreat to enquire about God "encountered a statue. For he would utter not a word to any of them, but fixing his eyes and gazing up to the sky he would lie there speechless and unrelenting" ([59]). While meaning to praise Antoninus, Eunapius here puts his finger on the greatest shortcoming of the pagan

(56) EUNAPIUS, *V. Phil.*, VII, 6, 3-13.

(57) On conversions back to paganism, see my forthcoming article, *Persecution and Response in Late Paganism : the Evidence of Damascius*, in *JHS*, 113 (1993).

(58) JULIAN, *Fr.*, 161 for the *ἱεροφάντωρ Iamblichus ; MARINUS, Procl.*, 19 : "it is becoming for the philosopher to worship not just the gods of one city or even of one nation, but to be the hierophant of the entire world".

(59) EUNAPIUS, *V. Phil.*, VI, 10, 10.

holy man : his lack of common touch. Elsewhere he comments with astonishment on the informality of Aedesius' manner which, needless to say, earned him the abuses of his colleagues ([60]).

If we consider the social status of late antique converts to paganism, we will immediately realise how hopelessly horizontal was the pagan prophet's radiance in his society. The shrewd Alexander of Abonoteichos had, despite his Pythagorean allegiance, also provided in his establishment for the needs of a social and linguistic mosaic ([61]). But none of his successors consciously followed his example. Trapped for some time between the new formality of the oracles and the unreliability of the magician, the man in the street did not know where to take his daily problems, until the emergence of the hermits of Egypt and Mesopotamia regularised the situation. To what extent the crisis in pagan prophecy caused by its late antique agents prompted the rise of the Christian saint is food for thought, but what remains certain is that the New Oracle took over the functions of its classical predecessor in their entirety : high politics, affairs of the heart and the body, spiritual matters and the regularisation of ritual came together as the prerogative of the holy man. The field of competence granted him by society was so broad, that sceptics had to question once again the very existence of this all-knowing monster : in the early sixth century Varsanuphios had to emerge from his cell and wash the feet of the brethren in order to allay the suspicions of a questioner who felt that the invisible saint was but an invention of Abba Seridos ([62]).

(60) *Ibid.*, VIII, 1, 5-9.

(61) For oracles in vernacular languages, see LUCIAN, *Alex.*, 51.

(62) Barsanuphios and John of Gaza, *Correspondence*, transl. from the Greek by L. Regnault and Ph. Lemaire (1972), N° 125, p. 111.

XI

THE FATE OF ORACLES IN LATE ANTIQUITY: DIDYMA AND DELPHI*

In an essay written in the early years of Hadrian's reign, the aged Plutarch, priest of Apollo at Delphi for about a quarter of a century, argued that the changed form of the oracles, now rendered in prose rather than verse, was proof that the sanctuary moved with the times: in accordance with the spirit of a peaceful age, people asked pedestrian questions and received straightforward answers[1]. This lowering of tone, Plutarch explained, brought swarms of pilgrims to Delphi from lands both Greek and barbarian, while the oracle's renewed international appeal caused the Amphictyonic League to undertake an extensive programme of restoration: dilapidated buildings had been restored, new monuments had been erected and the sanctuary was filled as of old with dedicatory offerings[2]. On the whole "affluence, splendour and honour" had succeeded the prophetic drought, of which Plutarch had complained when he had assumed his priestly duties, probably under Domitian[3].

This optimistic picture has been fully corroborated by independent evidence. Not only Delphi, but many other ancient oracles of the Greek East revived in Hadrianic times. Yet, though the extraordinary flowering of oracular activity under the Antonines has received due emphasis in modern scholarship, the same cannot be said of subsequent developments. The purpose of this paper is to investigate what exactly happened in the third and fourth centuries to Delphi and Didyma, the two sites which, along with Claros, loom largest in Christian polemical literature. The reason why Claros must be omitted from this discussion is that the literary evidence concerning the functioning of the oracle in the late third and up to the mid-fourth century has not been confirmed by material finds[4]. Conversely, we possess a wealth of archaeological, epigraphic and literary information from and about Didyma and Delphi, which has not yet been examined as a whole.

THE CASE OF DIDYMA

From the time of its revival under Alexander the Great, the oracle of the Hellenised Carian god Apollo Didymaeus[5] was run by upper-class Greek provincials, whose natural conservatism increased with the passing of time[6]. Like many other oracles, Didyma experienced a revival in the Antonine period and, though during the troubles of the third century the Milesian aristocracy's enthusiasm for filling religious posts diminished somewhat, nothing in our evidence suggests any discontinuity in the functioning of the oracle between Severan and Diocletianic times[7]. Not far from the temple, in the

* I would like to thank Dr M. Hatzopoulos and M. V. Dêroche for discussing with me parts of this paper and offering advice on specific points.

1. Mor. 408 b-f; for Plutarch's struggles against traditionalists, who favoured the delivery of oracles in obscure poetic language, *ibid.* 408de; 409cd ("such an attitude is infantile, nay absolutely idiotic", 409c); for a discussion of the form of oracles, see P. Amandry, A propos des oracles delphiques de l'Archilocheion de Paros, ΣΤΗΛΗ: εἰς μνήμην Νικολάου Κοντολέοντος, 1980, pp. 242-248. For the dating of the De Pyth. or. c. A.D. 125, see R. Flacelière, Hadrien et Delphes, CRAI 1971, pp. 177-181, and id., Plutarque, Oeuvres Morales VI (1974), p. 40.

2. Mor. 408f-409a.

3. Mor. 409b: ὥσπερ ἐξ αὐχμοῦ τῆς πρόσθεν ἐρημίας καὶ πενίας εὐπορίαν καὶ λαμπρότητα καὶ τιμήν, and 434bc. For the composition of the De def. orac. between 85 and 90, see R. Flacelière, Plutarque et la Pythie, REG 46 (1945), p. 73, and id. Plutarque, Oeuvres Morales VI (1974), p. 86.

4. Latest inscriptions from the mid-third century, H. W. Parke, The oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor, 1985 (henceforth Oracles (1985), pp. 169-170, basing himself on L. Robert, Les fouilles de Claros, 1954, p. 23; last coins of Ionian cities showing delegations at Claros, also from the 250s, BMC (Ionia), p. 45, No 59.

5. For the Carian origins of Apollo Didymaeus, see A. Laumonier, Les cultes indigènes en Carie, 1958, pp. 560-561 (on linguistic grounds) and Parke, Oracles (1985), p. 27 (on iconographical grounds).

6. H. W. Parke, The Massacre of the Branchidae, JHS 105 (1985), pp. 59-68.

7. On Antonine prosperity, Parke, Oracles (1985), pp. 72-81; on subsequent difficulties, *ibid.* pp. 84-88. Cf. the case of Aelian Poplas, a prominent member of the Milesian aristocracy, active in the early third century, L. Robert, Trois oracles de la Théosophie et un prophète d'Apollon, CRAI 1968, pp. 568-586; as prophet, he sponsored games, Did. II, No 363A; on hecatombs offered by a female relative in the following generation, Did. II, No 363A and 375; on his financial problems, Theos. Tub. No 22 together with L. Robert, CRAI 1981, pp. 534-535.

small temenos, baths were built around 200, and the area to the west of the Sacred Way was remodelled in a fashion that K. Tuchelt connects with the games that are so richly attested in the inscriptions[8]. Indeed, there are strong indications that in the middle of the third century new Pythian games were instituted at Didyma, in tune with more general practice[9]. At the same time, consultations, copious sacrifices, dedications of altars, and other personal acts of piety are reported at the oracle, while not a single "prophetless year" —ἀπροφήτευτος ἐνιαυτός— is attested from that period[10]. Moreover the continuing popularity of the Didymaean Apollo is reflected in contemporary coinage[11], jewelry[12], and statuary[13], which helped to enhance and spread the god's fame abroad. Here it must be stressed that by the third century the clergy of Apollo had succeeded in striking an admirable balance between continuity and change as regards the image and functions of the god. On the one hand, Apollo, whose iconographical type had remained astonishingly faithful to the Archaic cult statue by Canachos, continued to regulate matters of cult and ritual[14]; on the other hand the god not only espoused all the latest trends in paganism, but even pronounced verdicts on Jewish and Christian theology[15].

Despite their wealth and sentiments of civic pride, however, the few families that ran the affairs of Miletos and the sanctuary at Didyma in the third century regarded imperial support as increasingly important to the maintenance of tradition. No sooner had Caracalla been murdered than ambassadors were dispatched to Macrinus to present him with a copy of the cult statue, which the emperor duly worshipped[16]. In the following decades, embassies continued to travel to Rome begging for grants and immunities[17], while back at home new generations were raised according to custom, participating from childhood in literary and sportive contests at the shrine of the god.

This combination of piety and booming cultural life was gravely compromised in the 260s, when the Goths were reported to be advancing towards Didyma. As soon as they received the news, the authorities acted with the utmost efficiency. Deciding to use the huge open-air adyton of the temple (an area of some thousand square metres) as a refuge for the surrounding population, they set about transforming the building into a fortress[18]. Since construction work on the temple was still in progress, experienced masons will have been available when the emergency occurred to be called upon to make the place impregnable by walling up its eastern front. Though provisional, the wall was expertly and carefully built, and its central gate was so constructed as to allow the continuation of the cult as normal[19].

However, before transfering the population to the temple, the authorities had to solve two important problems. The first involved access to the adyton, which was at a considerably lower level than the prodomos. Till then, communication between the two parts of the temple had been effected by two narrow sloping passages, on either side of the threshold of the adyton's central portal which was as high as a wall[20]. The masons who built the defence wall also connected the prodomos and this threshold by means of steps, so that the refugees could circulate freely. It was presumably this practical need, rather than any sudden change in the ritual of consultation, that obliged the builders of the fortification-works to interfere with the traditional architecture of the temple in the mid-third century[21]. The second problem involved water. Once the temple was transformed into a fortress, the population settled in the adyton needed water and, as H. W. Parke has argued, rather than allowing them to profane the sacred spring in the adyton, the authorities looked urgently for an alternative source, whose discovery was ascribed to Apollo's miraculous power[22].

The Goths were repelled, but their threat loomed on the horizon for a few more years. And when, by the late 260s, the area seemed safe again, not all the squatters returned to their pillaged settlement[23]. Ensconced in their tents and sheds among the scattered trees of the adyton, the remnant savoured the cosy intimacy of slums inside the walls of a numinous building. They had been bound to the place and each other by emergency and danger, and had acquired new habits, like so many people from the area in the bidonvilles of contemporary Izmir, Ankara and Istanbul. Who could eject them?

Meanwhile the oracle continued to function, the prophets using the traditional passages in the performance of their duties, and oscillating between pity and indignation at the spectacle of the squatters. In view of the legacy of the war, the maintenance of the place must have become increasingly difficult, though it is important to stress that the occupation of the temple by the paupers of the area must have been seen by the authorities as a nuisance rather than a profanation[24]. Efforts were still being made by the great Milesian families to sustain and even revive the sanctuary. Indeed, it is overwhelmingly likely that Aelius Granianus Macer, the son and relative of prophets, who even as a child had won a prize in a rhetorical contest at Didyma, became prophet in this period; and while his wife, Agatho, saw to the repair of the prophet's house, he himself launched a restoration programme, ἔθη (...) πάτρια ἀνενεώσατο[25].

The squatters led their lives in gradually deteriorating

conditions[26], until in the early 290s the proconsul Festus had the neglected spring cleared and a fountain built for the sake of the people[27]. This event was much advertised, if we judge from three epigrams which, in different words, praise the proconsul for the erection of the fountain. Perhaps the poems, which are carefully inscribed on the same stele, are the winning entries in a literary competition which formed part of games[28]. What dictates the hypothesis of three separate poets, rather than a single author exhibiting his ingenuity, is the fact that two of the poems are composed in the same metre[29]. But we are already in Diocletianic times. The oracle, which, thanks to the obstinacy and cultural patriotism of its prophets had survived through difficult years, could at last look forward to better days[30].

The uneasy *modus vivendi* between the Milesian clergy and the temple inhabitants must have broken down, when the former saw a unique opportunity to rid the adyton of its squalid tenants at last. A good number among them were Christians, or so the prophet surmised; as such, they must be expelled. Whether the dication made at Didyma κατὰ ὄναρ. Cf. Did. II, No 496 and Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 543-546.

15. On the identification of Apollo with Helios in the third century, see LIMC II 1, 332a and Robert, CRAI 1968, p. 583, n. 5. On "theological oracles" issued by Didyma, Robert, CRAI 1968, pp. 589-599 and Parke, Oracles (1985), pp. 104-105.

16. Milet I, 7, No 274 together with Robert, CRAI 1981, pp. 534-535. Also Milet I, 6, No 191, which need not be Julianic.

17. Did. II, No 332; Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 469-470, and, above, n. 7.

18. By that date, Didyma had reached a certain degree of urbanisation, cf. K. Tuchelt, Tempel-Heiligtum-Siedlung: Probleme zur Topographie von Didyma, U. Jantzen (ed.), Neue Forschungen in griechischen Heiligtümern, 1976, p. 215.

19. H. Knackfuss, Did. I, p. 42, *pace* Tuchelt, *op.cit.*, p. 216, who, following Rehm, sees the erection of the wall as setting off a process of profanation; see also below, n. 24. The careful building of the wall suggests, among other things, the availability of funds.

20. An ingenious explanation of this architectural oddity based on historical analogy is provided by H. W. Parke, The Temple of Apollo at Didyma: The Building and its Function, JHS 106 (1986), pp. 121-131.

21. For a description of the temple and the manner of consulation, see the vivid pages of R. Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians, 1986, pp. 182-183. For an interpretation of the passages' meaning, cf. J. C. Montegu, Note on the *labyrinths* of Didyma, AJA 80 (1976), pp. 304-305. On the steps, K. Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten zu einer Topographie von Didyma, 1973, pp. 112-114. On the similarity of techniques between the two undertakings, *ibid.*, p. 114 and pl. 38.4. Knackfuss, Did. I, p. 43, connected the steps with the Adyton basilica and, consequently, dated them to the late fourth or early fifth century (both his chronologies have been proved incorrect); Tuchelt, *ibid.*, attempts to explain the mid-third century date of the steps by assuming a revival of some unknown Archaic cultic procedure.

22. Parke, Oracles (1985), pp. 94-96. Likewise, St. Thecla solves the crisis resulting from a cattle epidemic when she reveals a miraculous spring near the shrine in Seleuceia (Mir. 36). It is difficult to understand why Rehm, who published so many inscriptions attesting the vitality of the shrine in the third century, thought that by the 260s the prophetic spring was extinct and the cult neglected (Did. II, p. 323). This hypothesis led him to argue that the spring of the refugees was identical with the revived oracular one (cf. commentary to Did. II, No 159), a point on which he was followed by Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten, p. 114.

23. Tuchelt, IstMitt 30 (1980), p. 119.

24. The profanation theory was first expressed by Rehm (commentary to Did. II, No 159) and is widely accepted, cf. H. Hommell, Juden und Christen im kaiserzeitlichen Milet, IstMitt 25 (1975), pp. 194-195. Yet, it is easy to suppose that, just as the squatters were not allowed to use the prophetic spring, so too a certain area of the adyton must have remained taboo; for an exact parallel, cf. Thucydides II. 17.

25. For Granianus Macer's victory ἔνκω[μίῳ], see Did. II, No 182, l. 20 with Robert's restitution, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 446-449. As prophet: Robert, *op.cit.*, pp. 460-463 and Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten, p. 62.

26. Did. II, No 159 III, ll. 9, 14.

27. Did. II, No 159 I, l. 9; II, ll. 3-4.

28. Did. II, No 159 and Parke, Oracles (1985), p. 94, on whose suggestion I elaborate. For a similar case, Milet I, 9, No 339.

29. A single poet treating the same theme in several compositions usually chose different metres as well, cf. Alan Cameron, Iamblichus at Athens, Athenaeum 45 (1967), p. 145.

30. Did. II, Nos 89, 90 (imperial dedications).

8. Cf. K. Tuchelt, Didyma. Bericht über die Arbeiten der Jahre 1975-1979, IstMitt 30 (1980), p. 118. On prophets sponsoring games up to c. 230 A.D. Did. II, Nos 243, 244 (Granianus II, Diodorus Phanias, on whom see Did. II, pp. 146 and 226b); No 156 (M. Aurelius Ophellius Diadumenus); No 372 (Apellaius Zosimus); No 252 (Aurelius Lacydes); No 278 (Ulpius Athenagoras II). For a younger generation, Nos 363A and 375 (hecatombs in the 250s) and Did. II, p. 226b; W. Günther, IstMitt 27/28 (1977-78), pp. 297-300 (Artemidorus); No 277 (T.F. Ulpianus II); Nos 252 (Aurelius Archegos), 305, 372, 157 (ἀγωνοθεσίαι and similar activities in the 250s or late.

9. Did. II, Nos 252, 305, 332 together with Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 469-470; FD III 1, No 555, FD III 4, No 476. For the foundation of Pythian games, see P. Weiss, Ein agonistisches Bema und die isopythischen Spiele von Side, Chiron 11 (1981), pp. 315-346; Bull. Epigr. 1982, No 450; C. Roueché, Rome, Asia and Aphrodisias in the third century, JRS 71 (1981), p. 119.

10. The only evidence we have for an ἀπροφήτευτος ἐνιαυτός comes from the first century A.D.: Did. II, No 237 II and Milet I 3, p. 286 for the date; cf. also Gnomon 31 (1959), p. 673.

11. From Septimius Severus to Gallienus, the local coinage, both civic and allied, is particularly rich in representations of the Didymaean Apollo, either alone or in combination with other deities: cf. L. Lacroix, Les reproductions de statues sur les monnaies grecques, 1949, pp. 221-224; E. Babelon, Inventaire sommaire de la Collection Waddington, 1898, No 188 (Milesian coins advertising the Didymeian games).

12. J. D. Beazley, The Lewes House Collection of Ancient Gems, 1920, No 109, pp. 91-92; S. Papaspyridi Karouzou, Δακτυλιόλιθος ἐκ Μιλήτου, AE 1937, pp. 705-707.

13. For reliefs from Miletus and Didyma, see LIMC II 1, 332a-c (W. Lambrinudakis).

14. Did. II, No 504 (recipient, Prophet Damianus); W. Günther, IstMitt 21 (1971), pp. 99-105 (recipient, the treasurer Hermias); id., IstMitt 35 (1985), pp. 189-191 (recipient, a πραγματευτής): first dedi-

stressingly fragmentary inscription *Didyma* 306 is actually the oracle which unleashed the Diocletianic persecution, we cannot know, but it certainly contains allusions to an encounter of the prophet with the squatters (l. 2: ἐν τῇ καταβάσει) which, far from settling matters, degenerated into a riot. Driven by despair, the crowd may well have set fire to parts of the temple[31], thus provoking the god's wrath. What happened subsequently is well-known. After peace was established for the Church, the intransigent prophet, who characteristically was also a philosopher, was sought out in Miletos, tortured and put to death[32].

Meanwhile, a second generation of adyton-dwellers had come of age. And, while Eusebius was telling the world that Apollo Didymaeus had fallen silent[33], the oracle continued to function as always, and Christians and pagans went on rubbing shoulders in its holy of holies. In order both to satisfy their cultic needs and to irritate Apollo, the Christians had began to build chapels in honour of martyrs in the area. How many martyria there were and when exactly they were put up are questions which cannot be answered. All we know is that, by the early 360s, at least two chapels were functioning close enough to the temple for their presence to be considered ritually offensive[34]. As institutional Christianity began to encroach on Didyma, Apollo vacillated between discretion and resentment, according to the temperament of his annual prophet. His oracles continued to be registered at the χρησμογράφιον, including those that threatened bitter revenge against anyone who dared attack his priests or compromise their privileges[35]. Whether these oracles, which in due course gained wide publicity, were specifically inspired by the fate of the unlucky philosopher-priest or by general imperial policy in the 340s and 350s it is not possible to tell.

A last fine moment for Didyma came in 362, when the lot chose as prophet no less a person than the emperor himself, something which had not happened since Hadrian's day[36]. Julian took his duties seriously. A milestone marking the fourth mile of the Sacred Way seems to indicate that he undertook its repair[37]; moreover, in a series of letters to his clergy, the *pontifex maximus* publicised Apollo's wrath against those who had shown disrespect to his servants[38] and, more importantly, gave orders to pull down all Christian chapels in the area[39]. Two circumstances seem to have played a decisive role in the adoption of this last measure. The emperor, who was resident at Antioch, had witnessed the burning of the temple of Apollo at Daphne just after the relics of the martyr Babylas, which were tormenting the god and preventing him from rendering oracles, had been moved out of the sacred grove; at the same time, he had received a letter from the high-priest of Caria denouncing the governor of the province for maintaining secret relations with bishops and for having ordered the public beating of a pagan priest. Julian was angry. He responded with a letter in which, as well as ordering the destruction of all Christian buildings at Didyma, he condemned the governor's dealings with bishops and inflicted on him a spiritual punishment, forbidding him to enter the temples of the gods for three lunar months[40].

To what extent Julian's orders were carried out is unknown and scarcely relevant[41]. After his reign, other churches were put up in the area, the sacred spring became an *ayiasma* and, eventually, the settlement was moved back to its original place, while a basilica was built out of spoils in the very adyton of the temple[42]. The village, which had started as a community of squatters in the cella of the temple, was soon legalised under the telling name Hieron, as medieval Didyma was baptised, and the age-old holiness of the place was more widely recognised by the elevation of the modest settlement into a bishopric[43].

LATE ANTIQUE DELPHI

In the less privileged province of Achaia, Delphi too had its Antonine revival, which was prolonged into the Severan age[44]. From then on, inscriptions are a valuable guide, as their record between the early third and the mid-fourth century forms a relatively continuous body of evidence, its salient features being parochial traditionalism and adulation of the imperial power. The first tendency becomes evident in the sudden revival of long-forgotten titles and the belated assumption by the city of the epithet "holy"[45]; enthusiasm for the powers-that-be on the other hand is expressed through the incessant dedication of statues, not least to those emperors who, from the point of view of pagan Delphi, were utter philistines[46]. But the benefits gained through this policy, which was consistently followed probably even into the fifth century, were considerable: while the third century opens with a restoration of the temple of Apollo by the proconsul Leonticus[47], in the third quarter of the fourth century the Delphians can still afford to dedicate an expensive monument to their "benefactors", Valens and Valentinian[48]. In the meantime, the place lived out its Indian summer as an international centre of games and Greek culture. Apollo was seen once more as the arbiter of Hellenism[49], and cities from Macedonia, Thrace and Asia Minor sought the god's sanction for the foundation of local games, while famous athletes came repeat-

edly to Delphi to seek Pythian victory[50]. Next to them, philosophers and men of letters took to visiting the sanctuary, thus rendering the city "a real temple of the Muses, inspired by the god who presides over them"[51]. For, as Plutarch had proclaimed, "the god was no less a philosopher than a prophet"[52]. In this double capacity, Apollo gave his opinion on several third and fourth century philosophers, the most famous instances being the long oracle on the fate of Plotinus' soul and the verdict on the respective merits of Porphyry and Iamblichus[53]. As these texts show, the priests of Apollo were fully aware of all latest developments in philosophy and, in the quarrel between noetic and theurgic Neoplatonism, usually pronounced themselves in favour of the latter trend.

Inscriptional evidence suggests that from the end of the third century onwards, the centre of gravity began to move away from the oracle towards the city. It is indeed indicative of this shift that the inscription accompanying the statues of Valens and Valentinian is the first in which the city abandons her claim to holiness, though not to prosperity.

A few decades earlier, statues had been dedicated by "the holy city of Delphi" to Constantine and to his immediate family[54]. Indeed, the connection of the sanctuary with the imperial house in the second quarter of the fourth century may have been closer than has been

31. l. 5, my reconstruction: [ἐνὲ]πρ[η]σάν τε [κ]αὶ τῶν θεοῦ, and cf. Rehm's: [τειᾳ] πρ[ό]σαν τε[ς], αἰτῶν θεοῦ. For a more imaginative reconstruction, see H. Grégoire, Les chrétiens et l'oracle de Didymes, Mélanges Holleaux, 1913, pp. 81-91.

32. Eusebius PE IV. 2.11.

33. Eusebius PE IV. 2.8.

34. Sozomen HE V. 20.7: the martyria were πλησίον τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Διδυμαίου 'Απόλλωνος.

35. See below, n. 38.

36. For imperial prophets, see Did. II, Nos 318, 407 (Trajan); No 494 (Hadrian); Julian ep. 88.451b (Julian).

37. Did. II, No 60. Did. II, No 57 marks the eleventh mile of the Sacred Way and specifically mentions the building of the road by Trajan, who also became prophet of Apollo; C. P. Jones, An oracle given to Trajan, Chiron 5 (1975), p. 405, suggests a connection between the two acitivities.

38. Ep. 89b.298a; ep. 88.451a (oracle repeated in ep. 89b.297c).

39. Sozomen HE V. 20.7. SIG[3], No 906A is an inscription in Julian's honour, in which the city of Miletos styles herself, significantly, τροφὸς τοῦ Διδυμαίου 'Απόλλωνος.

40. Ep. 88; J. Bidez had already suggested that the letter was sent to the governor of Caria (L'Empereur Julien, Oeuvres complètes I 2, 1960[2], p. 101). I find it more than probable that the essentials of the missing start of the letter are supplied by Sozomen HE V. 20.7.

41. Yet it was a theme that caught the imagination in the following centuries, cf. K. Weitzmann, Byzantion 16 (1942-43), pp. 129-134 and pl. I.

42. On churches, U. Peschlow, Byzantinische Plastik in Didyma, IstMitt 25 (1975), pp. 254-257. On transformation of sacred spring, Did. I, 43. The basilica is dated by Peschlow, *art.cit.*, p. 211, to the late fifth or early sixth century, the latter date being preferable in view of the fact that the rebuilding of the settlement is dated by Tuchelt to the early sixth century, IstMitt 11 (1961), p. 40.

43. On the identification of medieval Didyma with Hieron, see Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 496-502.

44. R. Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians, 1986, pp. 187, 576.

45. Revival of ancient titles: Th. Homolle, BCH 20 (1896), p. 719. For ἡ ἱερὰ Δελφῶν πόλις: *ibid.* and G. Daux, BCH 63 (1939), p. 181.

46. Begging of privileges: FD III, No 328 (Commodus); No 329 (Sept. Severus and Caracalla); No 332 (Elagabalus and Severus Alexander); E. Bourguet, De rebus delphicis imperatoriae aetatis, 1905, p. 92 (Gallienus). Dedications of statues: B. Haussoulier, BCH 6 (1882), p. 453 (Sept. Severus); FD III, No 274 together with R. Flacelière, BCH 73 (1949), p. 475 (Gordian III); Th. Homolle, BCH 20 (1896), p. 728 (Valerian); J. Jannoray, BCH 70 (1946), p. 260 (Carus); FD III, No 275 together with C. Vatin, BCH 86 (1962), pp. 229-230 and P. Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), p. 733 (three dedications to Constantine I); G. Daux, BCH 63 (1939), p. 179 (Dalmatius); FD III, No 75 and J. Jannoray, BCH 70 (1946), p. 260 (two dedications to Constans).

47. FD III, Nos 269 and 331 (last recorded restoration).

48. C. Vatin, BCH 86 (1962), p. 238.

49. For the Delphic Apollo as the arbiter of Greek culture infinitely reproduced in the Hellenistic world, see J. Defradas, Les thèmes de la propagande delphique, 1954, pp. 268-283; L. Robert, Les inscriptions, P. Bernard (ed.), Fouilles d'Aï Khanoum I, 1973, pp. 207-237 (and CRAI 1968, pp. 416-457); A. N. Oikonomides, The Lost Delphic Inscription with the Commandments of the Seven and P. Univ. Athen. 2782, ZPE 37 (1980), pp. 179-183. For a resumption of this role in the mid-third century, cf. L. Robert, Bull. (1982), No 450, pp. 420, 422.

50. See above, n. 9. Famous athletes in the third century: FD III, Nos 476, 551, 556, 557. In an unpublished inscription from Delphi, dated by C. Vatin in 251 (Delphes à l'époque impériale (thèse de 3ème cycle, 1965, pp. 254-255), the herald Valerius Eclectus proclaims his third Pythian victory. For agonistic inscriptions of imperial period not yet studied, see BCH 110 (1986), p. 782.

51. Heliodorus, Eth. II.27.2 and J. Pouilloux, Les Ethiopiques d'Héliodore et la réalité delphique, REG 97 (1984), pp. XXIV-XXV (archaeology corroborating the image painted by Heliodorus). For men of culture receiving Delphian citizenship in the imperial period (possibly in the second century, FD III 1, p. 113): FD III, Nos 206, 207, 210, 216, and 199, 203 for philosophers from Antioch and Smyrna respectively; for a third-century portrait of a philosopher, see F. Poulsen, Portrait d'un philosophe néoplatonicien trouvé à Delphes, BCH 52 (1928), pp. 245-255.

52. Mor. 385b; cf. Julian or. IX. 188a.

53. Syncellus, Chron. (Mosshammer), 442: Themistocles (possibly the Stoic mentioned in Porphyry, Plot. 20. 33-34), Porphyry, Plot. 22; in attributing the oracle on Plotinus' soul to Delphi, I follow, among others, M. Nilsson, GGR II[2], 1961, p. 469. J. Igal, El enigma del oracolo de Apolo sobre Plotino, Emerita 52 (1984), pp. 83-115 suggests that the oracle was composed by Amelius and issued with the approval of the Delphic priesthood. R. Goulet, L'oracle d'Apollon dans la Vie de Plotin, L. Brisson et al. (eds), Porphyre, La vie de Plotin I, 1982, pp. 369-412, arguing that the oracle's *Sitz-im-Leben* is to be found in theurgic circles in Syria, is unconvincing. David, In Porph. Isag. 4 (CAG XVIII.2, p. 92): Porphyry and Iamblichus. For Themistius, see below, n. 63.

54. Cf. above, n. 46.

suspected; for it is overwhelmingly likely that Count Felicianus, priest of Apollo in the early 340s, was a disgraced member of the Second Flavian dynasty. This claim is based on an as yet unpublished inscription from Delphi, of which the following is a translation[55]:

> Letters sealed by decree of the *damiourgoi* and engraved in the public archives.
> Flavius Domitius Leontius, Fabius Titianus, Furius Placidus to Count Flavius Felicianus, greetings.
> We find it unbecoming that you, who have deserved the priesthood of the Pythian Apollo, who have been raised to every single honour by our deified (ἐν θεοῖς) emperor, and have been applauded by our own masters and by the whole city of Delphi, should be disturbed by someone in the very exercise of the priesthood. Since we personally respect you, and so that you stay in peace in future, we decree that, if from now on anybody should annoy you... we shall condemn him to be exiled from Delphi and pay a fine. We wish you health and prosperity.
> Fl. Dom. Leontius, Fa. Titianus, Fur. Placidus to Count Fl. Felicianus, greetings.
> ... to be priest of the Pythian Apollo and... accomplish the rites, because of your... on account of your acts... since no...

Before asking the obvious question, "who was Flavius Felicianus?", it might be useful to recall a few facts. During the years of Constantine's consolidation of absolute power, male members of his family had to keep a low profile. His half-brother Julius Constantius, for instance, lived in self-imposed exile in (among other places) Corinth, whence he was summoned in the early 330s to share in the administration of the empire[56]. His case was typical of his other brothers and nephews, for whom honours, however, lasted only a little longer than their ambivalent patron's life. When Constantine died on 22 May 337, the struggle for power began; for almost four months the emperor's death was kept secret while his sons and relatives strove to solve the problem of succession. Finally, during the night of 9 September all these men, with the exception of Constantine's three sons, perished in the coup-d'état staged by the army in Constantinople[57]. Flavius Felicianus, consul prior for 337, seems to have had more political acumen than the rest: for, foreseeing the outcome, he must have fled.

What Felicianus' exact relationship to Constantine was —if indeed he was a relative—, we do not know, but it seems that the emperor created for him the office of Count of the East[58]; and, as a cultured pagan, Felicianus chose to reside in the Museum of Antioch. Malalas, who reports these facts in slightly distorted form, attributes to Constantine's initiative the conversion of the museum into a praetorium and also, understandably, makes Felicianus a Christian[59]. What indeed reinforces the hypothesis that Flavius Felicianus was a blood relation of Constantine's is the fact that he suffered *damnatio memoriae* after his patron's death. Thus, on three inscriptions, the name of the senior consul for 337 is erased, while in two of them the order is reversed and Titianus appears first, the same Titianus to whom a few years later his former colleague appears to have addressed at least two letters[60].

Fleeing for safety, Felicianus must then have retired to Delphi, the care of whose oracle and monuments was a cause obscure enough for a disgraced member of the imperial family, yet sufficiently dignified to inspire in him some enthusiasm and usefully fill the declining years of a once important administrator. Count Felicianus brought to the priesthood of Apollo a renewed importance; when at some point he felt he was being disturbed in the exercise of his duties, possibly by Christians, he found it intolerable. Being unable, for obvious reasons, to have recourse to the emperors, he addressed himself to their immediate subordinates.

On the strength of three inscriptions, including ours, Ch. Vogler has argued that, after Constantine's death, "summit meetings" among the praetorian prefects became a rule. What these periodical meetings aimed at was the standardisation of policy throughout the empire, especially in religious matters[61]. If this is so, Felicianus, who was well informed about these procedures, will have written to his old friend and fellow-consul for 337, Fabius Titianus, now Praetorian Prefect for Gaul, pressing for a ruling that would guarantee the cult of Apollo and the functioning of the oracle at Delphi. During the next conference, Titianus submitted the request to his colleagues, Flavius Leontius, Praetorian Prefect of the East and Furius Placidus, Praetorian Prefect in Italy, who then agreed to appease Felicianus by personalising the issue. In a joint document, the three praetorian prefects struck the right tone between cordiality and respect and assured their aristocratic recipient of their full support: whoever dared annoy him in the exercise of his priestly duties, would instantly be sent into exile and pay a fine.

However, Felicianus was not discouraged by this polite letter. As a man used to seeing his wishes fulfilled on the spot, he appealed again, repeating his request and causing a second joint communication to reach Delphi. Hopelessly fragmentary, this second document does not leave much scope for reconstruction. All we may assume is that it was written along the lines of the first letter. Count Felicianus must have understood; the

council of the *damiourgoi* passed a decree whereby both the official letters were inscribed in the public archives[62]; and the affair was closed.

No more is heard of Felicianus and we may safely assume that when some twenty years later, a younger relative, who like himself escaped the massacre of 337, became emperor, the count-priest was no longer around; otherwise, Julian would have acknowledged his presence and capitalised on his story. On the other hand, it is possible that the two men felt a certain coolness towards each other, as adherents of diametrically opposite philosophical schools. The cultured Felicianus may very well be the priest who pronounced Themistius the wisest living man, in order to arrest the tide of Iamblichan Neoplatonism that was beginning to flood Greece[63].

Early in his reign, Julian sent his personal doctor and close associate, Oribasius, to inspect the sanctuary[64]. Faithful to a long tradition of dignified beggary, the Delphians then asked for imperial aid by means of an oracle which overdramatised the situation[65]. Julian seems to have provided some help and, in gratitude, an oracle predicting victory over the Persians was in due course issued[66].

Whether that was the last oracle delivered by Delphi is of no importance. Under Julian's successors, the city abdicated her sanctity; archaeological evidence suggests for all that period a slight somnolence, which was only dispelled in the fifth century, when the city expanded and its fortification wall was restored and extended[67]. Though some of Delphi's public buildings were occupied and others robbed for building materials, the general tendency was one of respect towards the city's past. Thus expansion rather than destruction of the centre was the seemingly conscious choice of the inhabitants. It is significant that the main street of the town, which was paved in the early fifth century and follows more or less the course of the Sacred Way, respected the temple of Apollo[68]. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the roof of the temple was restored for a last time at about this period[69]. All round the *peribolos* there have been excavated wealthy houses and a number of baths, some of which are now thought to have belonged to private mansions[70]. In at least one of these urban villas, continuity since Antonine times has been established; and it was in a late house in the centre of the town that the well-known statue of Antinous was found[71].

At Delphi, then, civic munificence seems to have followed a reverse course to the fate of the oracle, which relied for maintenance on a league of Greek cities and the central government. Already in 319, a member of an important Delphic family with Athenian affiliations offered a considerable amount so that the citizens could enjoy free bathing[72]. A little more than a century later, there was enough wealth at Delphi for its councillors to be constrained to spend money on giving spectacles at Rome; while local patriotism was sufficiently pugnacious for the city council to denounce the situation to the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum and demand the taking of measures to prevent the squandering of municipal revenues[73].

55. This translation is largely based on the reconstruction of the text made by C. Vatin, Delphes à l'époque impériale, pp. 258-259, which I found on the whole plausible after a reading of the inscriptions Nos 1647 and 4077 in the Museum at Delphi. In his commentary on the inscription, Vatin (*op.cit.*, pp. 260-264) identifies the praetorian prefects, but does not deal with the identity of Flavius Felicianus.

56. Julian, *ap.*, Lib. or. XIV.30.

57. My interpretation of the events between 22 May and 9 September 337 is based on Julian or. VII.228 ab; cf also E. Stein, Histoire du Bas-Empire I, 1959, p. 130.

58. Malalas 319 together with T. D. Barnes, The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine, 1982, p. 142.

59. Malalas 318-9.

60. Felicianus' name erased: Dessau, ILS 6112 (Paestum). In the two Roman inscriptions ICUR n.S. IV. 11088 and ILCV 2805 the order of the consuls is reversed and after Titianus there is a lacuna.

61. Ch. Vogler, Constance II et l'administration impériale, 1979, pp. 131-132.

62. On the office of the damiourgoi, see C. Vatin, Damiurges et épidamiurges à Delphes, BCH 85 (1961), pp. 236-255.

63. See Themistius or. 23. 295b-296a. For two equally plausible views on the identity of the consultant, see G. Fowden, The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society, JHS 102 (1982), p. 44 n. 92, and E. Vanderspoel, Themistios and a Philosopher at Sikyon, Historia 36 (1987), pp. 383-384.

64. As argued by T. Gregory, Julian and the Last Oracle at Delphi GRBS 24 (1983), pp. 355-366. For the transmission of the oracle in Byzantine literature, see A. Markopoulos, Kedrenos, Pseudo-Symeon, and the Last Oracle at Delphi, GRBS 26 (1985), pp. 207-210.

65. This is the famous "last oracle", reported by Philostorgius (HE (Bidez) 7, p. 77), and generally assumed to be a fake. Recently the balance seems to be shifting, cf. M. Henry, Le témoignage de Libanius et les phénomènes sismiques du IVe siècle de notre ère: essai d'interpétation, Phoenix 39 (1985), pp. 50-52, arguing that the oracle was delivered after the temple of Apollo had been damaged by the earthquake of the autumn 362.

66. Theodoret HE III.21.

67. V. Déroche, Etudes sur Delphes paléochrétienne, unpubl. mémoire, Ecole Française d'Athènes, 1986, p. 137 (Sacred Way); P. Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), pp. 742-746, for the rebuilding of the wall some time between the fourth and the sixth century. V. Déroche has mentioned to me in conversation that he thinks the wall was repaired in the fifth century.

68. Déroche, *op.cit.*, pp. 129-130, 137, 139-140 and Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), p. 746.

69. E. Hansen, letter 31.iii.88, invoking architectural arguments.

70. Déroche, *op.cit.*, 8-14 and BCH 109 (1985), p. 863.

71. BCH 109 (1985), p. 863; Déroche, *op.cit.*, p. 141 and Atlas, p. 431.

72. J. Bousquet, La donation de L. Gellius Menogeces à Delphes et les thermes de l'Est, BCH 76 (1952), pp. 653-660 together with L. Robert, Bull. (1954), No 146.

73. Cod. Theod. XV.5.4.

Eventually, the city became a bishopric[74], and an important basilica was built near the temple of Apollo[75]. Despite the damage wrought by *la grande fouille* (1896-99), enough evidence survives from fifth- and sixth-century Delphi to allow us to reconstruct a community with a flourishing economic life, a lively interest in contemporary culture, an evident taste for life's luxuries and, above all, a strong sense of civic identity and tradition[76]. When the oracle to which the place owed its international fame declined, the Delphians met the challenge by taking their city's fate into their hands[77]: where prophecy died, city pride was born, and this is a circumstance which may well account for the mildness of the transition from paganism to Christianity. Delphi, like late antique Athens, could afford to display a sane awareness of the glories of its past. Indeed, by the sixth century tradition had been so much re-interpreted and re-worked that it is not unlikely that the Nymph Castalia was given the place of honour in the narthex of the town's cemetery basilica[78].

Didyma and Delphi, two of the most famous oracles in late antiquity, could not be more dissimilar in terms of cultural and economic history. The first was supported by a rich city which benefited to the full from the Antonine revival and in turn lavished its wealth on its oracle. Conversely, Delphi was situated in one of the most unprivileged provinces of the Roman empire and was run by a league of unprosperous cities. Yet their oracular fortunes were remarkably similar: in a period in which divination was a burning issue for both Church and State, prophecy was definitively stamped out in both these oracular shrines, leaving just a vague memory of holiness which was adroitely exploited by the Church. Yet in their lazy cunning the Christian polemicists, led by Eusebius, went on using as late as the fifth century the same old anti-oracular rhetoric, whose specific allusions to such shrines as Didyma and Delphi had been relevant in Antonine times, but now simply confused the issue. For divination in late antiquity was very much a living business, but its locus had been significantly shifted. In the course of the fourth and fifth centuries informal dream and healing oracles acquired a renewed importance[79]; and at the same time as the traditional channels became blocked, prophecy took refuge in the privacy of men's sleep[80] and in the rites of the theurgist or the magician[81].

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this article:

BMC: B. V. Head, British Museum Catalogues of the Greec Coins (Ionia), 1892.

CAG: Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca.

Dessau, ILS: H. Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae, I-III, Berlin 1954-62[2].

Did I: Th. Wiegand, Didyma I: H. Knackfuss, Die Baubeschreibung, Berlin 1941.

Did II: A. Rehm-R. Harder, Didyma II: Die Inschriften, Berlin 1958.

Eusebius, PE: Eusèbe, La préparation évangélique, Paris 1974.

74. See J. Laurent, Delphes chrétien, BCH 23 (1899), pp. 273-277.

75. The so-called "peribolos basilica", pillaged for the construction of Hosios Loukas; architectural members found during *la grande fouille* were minutely described by J. Laurent, *art.cit.*, pp. 207ff., who believed in a conversion of the temple of Apollo between 425 and 450 (*art.cit.*, p. 271). Déroche, who dates the basilica to the second half of the fifth century (*op.cit.*, p. 87), proposes as its location the area to the NE of the temple of Apollo, inside the peribolos (p. 89).

76. Déroche, *op.cit.*, *passim.*

77. For evidence indicating a more general revival in the province of Achaia at that time, see G. Fowden, City and Mountain in Late Roman Attica, JHS 108 (1988), pp. 48-59.

78. CRAI 1969, pp. 275-279 and J.-P. Sodini, BCH 94 (1970), p. 711; the identification by M. Hatzidakis is made on tenuous grounds, as all that has been preserved from the representation is a hand holding an overflowing water jug.

79. For the oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius at Seleucia in Cilicia, see G. Dagron, Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle, 1978, *passim.* For the oracle of Isis at Menuthis, R. Herzog, Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis, Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums Franz Dölger.... dargeboten, 1939, pp. 117-127. For the oracle of Bes at Abydos, P. Perdrizet-G. Lefebvre, Le graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos, 1919, pp. XXI-XXIII.

80. See, among others, Synesius, De insomniis, *passim.*

81. Cf. my Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus, in JRS 83 (1993), 115-30.

XII

DREAMS, THEURGY AND FREELANCE DIVINATION: THE TESTIMONY OF IAMBLICHUS*

The men of the Antonine era shared with us a keen interest in divination, which they expressed in a variety of complementary or apparently contradictory ways: in polemic and dispassionate research, but more obviously in the act of reviving their ancient prophetic shrines and of establishing new oracles. If the rage that the vaticinating demons inspired in Oenomaus of Gadara and in Lucian is sufficient evidence of the rationalist's reaction to a mounting social and intellectual trend, the scholarly achievement of Artemidorus of Daldis at the instigation of Apollo himself exemplifies in more positive fashion the involvement of the age with prophetic lore.[1] So does the incredible success of the Pythagorean Alexander's oracular establishment on the inhospitable shores of the Black Sea, and the personality of Aelius Aristides, that professional valetudinarian whose night-diaries dictated by Asclepius covered more than three hundred thousand lines.[2] It was in precisely this world that the Delphic oracle underwent a remarkable renaissance under the auspices of a Platonist philosopher,[3] and that an emperor commended the publication by a senator of a work about the dreams which foretold his ascent to the throne.[4]

1. THEURGY, THE CATALYST OF DIVINATION

The Antonine revival of such famous oracles as Delphi, Didyma, and Claros and of the cultural values for which they stood has recently formed the object of intense scholarly research,[5] though curiously no great interest has been displayed towards the fate of these same oracles in subsequent periods. An attempt in this regard to track down the archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Didyma and Delphi and compare it with literary testimonies has revealed an interesting picture; by the mid-fourth century prophecy had been definitively stamped out in both shrines, leaving only a vague memory of sanctity which was adroitly exploited by the Church; its polemicists, sticking to long-established rhetorical clichés, continued to fulminate against Delphi and Didyma in their anti-pagan attacks, while their real target was home-made oracles and oniromancy.[6] It was indeed this new divination, catalysed by theurgy, that dominated late antiquity to such an extent that it was viewed by both Church and State as at the same time the most representative and the most pernicious aspect of the pagan spirit.[7]

Before attempting to define the new discipline of 'theurgy' (a task to which the whole of this paper in a sense is devoted), it may be useful to try to dispel the notions which were sown almost fifty years ago when E. R. Dodds published his epoch-making article in this journal.[8] Spurred by his private interests in psychoanalysis and spiritualism, Dodds saw in the Chaldaean Oracles, which form the theoretical basis of theurgical practices, a prime example of automatic writing:

* This paper has benefited in a variety of ways from the detailed criticism of John Avgherinos, Averil Cameron, John Dillon, Simon Price and the Editorial Committee.

[1] For the formidable attack on oracles by Oenomaus of Gadara, see Eusebius, *PE* v.18ff. and vi.7; cf. iv.2.14; for Lucian's attack, see his *Alex. passim*. For the true dimensions of Artemidorus' achievement, see S. R. F. Price, 'The future of dreams: from Freud to Artemidorus', *Past and Present* 113 (Nov. 1986), 3–37.

[2] *Sacred Tale* ii.3 (C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (1968)).

[3] On the role of Plutarch in this revival, see S. Swain, 'Plutarch, Hadrian and Delphi', *Historia* 40 (1991), 318–30.

[4] Dio Cassius lxxiii.23.1–2; cf. lxxix.10.1–2 (on the dreams of Septimius Severus).

[5] See *inter alia*, L. Robert, *A travers l'Asie Mineure* (1980), 393–421, and H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (1985), *passim*.

[6] See P. Athanassiadi, 'The fate of oracles in late antiquity: Didyma and Delphi', *Δελτίον Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* N.S. 15 (1989–90), 271–8.

[7] See *CTh* xvi.10.1 (321), ix.16.4 (357), ix.16.5 (357), ix.16.6 (358), ix.16.7 (364), ix.16.8 (370 or 373), ix.16.9 (371), ix.16.12 (409), xvi.10.7 (381), xvi.7.2 (383), xvi.10.9 (385), xvi.10.12.1 (392) etc. Equally all the *causes célèbres* of late antiquity involved the use of freelance divination: Ammianus xxix.1; Socrates, *HE* iv.19; Sozomen vi.35.

[8] E. R. Dodds, 'Theurgy and its relationship to Neoplatonism', *JRS* 37 (1947), 55–69.

> their diction is so bizarre and bombastic, their thought so obscure and incoherent as to suggest rather the trance utterances of modern spirit guides than the deliberate efforts of a forger. It seems indeed not impossible, in view of what we know about later theurgy, that they had their origin in the 'revelations' of some visionary or trance medium.[9]

Dodds' attitude towards theurgy was that of the uncharitable psychiatrist at work on the diagnosis of a morbid state whose random symptoms he raised to the status of unvaried characteristics. Absolving Plotinus of any involvement with the 'rigmarole' of theurgy, he turned for a definition of the discipline to that 'manifesto of irrationalism', Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*.[10] But in this task Dodds used as a criterion of his research post-Iamblichan practice and, examining the way in which Neoplatonists from Maximus to Proclus applied theurgical devices for divinatory purposes, he reached the conclusion that Iamblichan theurgy was a mere technique.[11] But of course theurgy is not just a technique (though by a tenuous definition it can be this as well), but rather a dynamic state of mind, varying from individual to individual and additionally undergoing constant change according to the theurgist's state of mind. Attempting a provisional definition based on Iamblichus' understanding of the term, I would describe theurgy as the often involuntary manifestation of an inner state of sanctity deriving from a combination of goodness and knowledge in which the former element prevails.

This revised form of prophecy, which gradually supplanted the traditional methods of the Roman East, naturally became the object of controversy both between pagans and Christians and between dissenting pagans, who discussed the merits of perpetual revelation in 'tens of thousands of essays' until their views hardened into party lines.[12] Of paramount importance among prophetological texts are Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. Composed at the beginning of the fourth century,[13] both works are of especial interest not so much as authoritative treatments of the theory and practice of divination (which is what they claim to be), but as complementary visions of the paths that prophecy was to take in the later Roman Empire. One of the aims of this paper is to show in what ways the *De Mysteriis* and the *Praeparatio Evangelica* influenced both the actual development of divination, and public opinion on the matter, but before doing that, a few remarks on Iamblichus and his posthumous fate are necessary.

Iamblichus was a revisionist thinker, and this characteristic was fully recognized by his followers, though not always as being a virtue; sometimes they complained of his unduly original interpretation of Plato and of a lack of clarity in expressing his views,[14] while at other times they took him at face value, failing completely to appreciate his considerable sense of humour.[15] This combination of intellectual ambiguity and playfulness is at the basis of Iamblichus' elusiveness; it is also however the source of his great charm, so that for centuries his followers displayed religious reverence towards his word and, beginning with the emperor Julian, claimed philosophical descent from him. This claim was considerably facilitated by a potent amount of misunderstanding on the part of Iamblichus' progeny, as Proclus' treatment

[9] ibid., 56–8.

[10] ibid., 59: 'the *de mysteriis* is a manifesto of irrationalism, an assertion that the road to salvation is found not in reason but in ritual'.

[11] ibid., 64.

[12] Eusebius, *PE* IV.2.14.

[13] It is impossible to date the *De Mysteriis* on other than internal criteria. On the grounds that Chaldaean influence is not yet as prominent in this work as in Iamblichus' later writings, J. M. Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Plat. dial. comm. fragmenta* (1973), 13, 18, dates the *De Mysteriis c.* 280. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 183, proposes by implication a date *c.* 300. Both the fact that Porphyry addressed so important a questionnaire to Iamblichus, and the self-confident tone of the latter's answer, suggest that by then Iamblichus was an established master. A date around 300 or slightly later is therefore probable. I have communicated this view to John Dillon, who finds it 'perfectly reasonable' (letter of 6.7.1990). The *Praeparatio Evangelica* was begun shortly after 313 and completed before 320: Barnes, 71–2.

[14] See Proclus, *In Ti.* II. 240. 4–5: ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος ἄνω που μετεωροπολεῖ καί τάφανῆ μερομνᾷ; *In Ti.* I. 426. 3ff. (= Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 34 and Dillon's commentary ad loc. pp. 307–9). This passage offers an excellent illustration of the difficulties faced by Iamblichus' followers when dealing with his exegesis; *In Ti.* III. 257. 24ff. (= Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 82A): Iamblichus is accused of not being a careful reader of Plato, of actually disregarding τοῦ Πλάτωνος τὴν λέξιν. This attitude is perpetuated by Proclus' epigoni who, while accepting Iamblichus' greatness, pronounce him too intuitive and therefore unclear: Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 10.1, 7; 11.2; 13.4; Damascius, *In Phaed.* 1.207; 548 (a good example of sticking to the letter of Iamblichan passages). For the close dependence of these commentaries on Proclus, L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* I (1976), 18.

[15] Anecdotes which illustrate both the humorous attitude of Iamblichus towards miracles and the incapacity of his pupils to understand the spirit behind his remarks are reported by Eunapius (*VS* v.2, v.1.7–10), whose manner of telling the stories illustrates this attitude all too well.

of the Iamblichan exegesis of Platonic texts amply shows.[16] The ineluctable attraction then experienced by renewed generations of 'Iamblichans' towards their master, coupled as it was with misunderstanding, resulted in the wide diffusion of a singularly distorted image of Iamblichus' contribution to theology. An idea of what happened can be obtained by comparing what Iamblichus actually says about divination in the *De Mysteriis* with what his followers made of it.

Invented by Marsilio Ficino, the random title 'De Mysteriis' has long served to obscure the fundamental fact that the book is as much an assessment of contemporary divinatory belief and practice as a programmatic work. For, within the framework of a theoretical discussion, it contains an apology for traditional cult while playing down the importance of sacred places as compared with the authority of holy men, the theurgists, who are repeatedly contrasted with mere craftsmen of spirituality. In this text, Iamblichus deals in highly critical, if unsystematic, fashion with the different kinds of divination practised in his day, and it is worth trying to disentangle the threads of his narrative and pin down their historical relevance (cf. III).

II. EUSEBIUS, IAMBLICHUS AND PORPHYRY

At the root of both the *Praeparatio Evangelica* and the *De Mysteriis* lies Porphyry. But whereas Eusebius treated him somewhat slyly as an authority for polemical purposes, Iamblichus used his text with an intensely corrective intent. Since this holy or unholy alliance (as the case may be) between the three men proved crucial for subsequent developments, it is important to look at it more closely.

Eusebius and Porphyry

Eusebius felt called upon to prove to the world the superiority of a religion that he intuitively knew to be the best. Confident in his belief, he saw nothing wrong in using any available means or method to achieve his objective. By contrast, Porphyry knew that truth had only been partially revealed to him, and saw life as the expanse within which he could find out more about the world and about himself. This attitude caused him to ask many questions and change his mind according to the answers he received. As Iamblichus put it, when it came to giving an opinion, 'Porphyry was at a loss'.[17] Eusebius cannot have failed to notice this feature of Porphyry's way of thinking; but, pretending not to understand how the philosopher's mind worked, he used Porphyry's fumbling hesitation and doubts to piece together a bible of paganism and put it at the disposal of his public.

However, the two men had much in common too. They were both voracious readers and ardent researchers. When Porphyry decided to investigate divination, he collected as many oracles as it was possible for a conscientious researcher to find. How he interpreted this material is not clear from the fragments of his work on the *Philosophy from Oracles*, which has reached us in the form of quotations by exclusively hostile critics. One thing seems certain however: Porphyry never suppressed evidence. Moreover, a careful study of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* suggests that, when faced with a collection of contradictory texts, Porphyry did not attempt to reconcile them. Rather than classifying his evidence at different theological levels — a method that would have allowed him nicely to combine conflicting views within the framework of a system — he viewed it with the critical eye of the philologist and was not afraid to admit his doubts or conclude his investigation with a question mark.

[16] For Julian on Iamblichus, see n. 99. A good example of Proclus believing that he agrees with Iamblichus, when in fact he does not, is provided by his *In Ti.* III. 173. 17–24; 175. 30–176. 1; for Proclus' conviction that he is following Iamblichus, cf. *In Ti.* III. 174. 16–17: ταῖς δὲ καθαρωτάταις ἐννοίαις Ἰαμβλίχου συνεψόμεθα, a promise which is not kept. Striking examples of this circumstance in connection with divination will be provided further in the text.

[17] 'Πορφύριος δὲ ἐνδοιάζει': Iamblichus, *On the Soul* (*ap.* Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.41.32, 866).

Porphyry's intellectual honesty was duly exploited by Eusebius,[18] who made him present the gods as impotent beings in the service of magicians,[19] as liars,[20] or, at best, as passably competent astrologers subject to fate.[21] Once interpreted in this spirit, the oracles collected by Porphyry together with his commentary were used by virtually everybody who wrote against divination and fate in the centuries to come.[22] As for Eusebius, he argued with faultless logic that the weak and immoral beings behind the oracles could not possibly be divine: they were either wicked demons[23] or human charlatans, whose only incentive was gain.[24]

Demoted to the level of demons, the gods of paganism were further characterized by Eusebius as mortal.[25] Indeed one of the major themes of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* is that, when Christ appeared on earth, many demons were annihilated; this process led gradually to the demise of oracles which by his day, Eusebius asserts, were fully silenced.[26] The claim is, of course, a large one, often contradicted by the apologist himself, who cannot control his anger at the foolishness of mankind still being deceived by the fraud of divination.[27]

Eusebius' emotional tone when referring to the state of oracles is fully understandable, especially in the light of the connection that had by his day been established between pagan prophecy and Christian persecution, the former instigating the latter.[28] As for the odd contradiction and the occasional error of logic in his work, they formed part of the polemical game and did not in any way prevent the message of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* from being clear: the overwhelming impression left by this text is that divination, cunningly identified with the great oracular sites, was a godless discipline on the way to extinction.[29]

Iamblichus and Porphyry

In his constant desire to understand the cosmos, Porphyry turned to his younger contemporary Iamblichus, and asked again some of the agonizing questions he had posed to Plotinus:[30] since gods and demons are topographically allocated in the universe, how is it that in theurgy gods are invoked as inhabiting areas not belonging to them?[31] What are the characteristic qualities of the different types of divinity?[32] Should one address prayers to gods?[33] Among gods, some are beneficent, others maleficent, or is this not the case?[34] How do incorporeal divinities mix with corporeal ones?[35] What is the typology of divine apparitions?[36] Above all, what exactly happens in the act of divination?[37] How does divination in traditional shrines differ from other more private types of prophecy?[38] How is it that the gods deign to serve flour-prophets (ἀλφιτομάντεις)?[39] Who reveals the future to men, a god, a demon, or an angel?[40] Is not the whole business of divination really a purely psychological phenomenon caused by a combination of inner and outward disturbances?[41]

[18] In *PE* IV.10–16.10 Eusebius makes Porphyry contradict himself on the subject of sacrifices by introducing abundant evidence from the *De Abstinentia* (II.7, 11–13, 24, 27, 36, 54–6, 60–1), while throughout the *PE* his main Porphyrian source is the *De Philosophia*.

[19] *Phil.* II (Wolff), pp. 154–64; *Ep. Aneb.* II.8–10b; I.2c and *PE* V.8–10.

[20] *Phil.* II, p. 169; III, pp. 175–6 and *PE* VI.5.

[21] *Phil.* II, pp. 166–8 and *PE* VI.1; *Phil.* II, p. 170 and *PE* VI.3.

[22] Two authors stand out in this respect, Theodoret (who actually acknowledges the *PE* to be his main source in his attack on paganism), *Affect.* II.97, and John Philoponus: Wolff, *Phil.*, pp. 118, 147–54, 156, 169, 170–7.

[23] *PE* III.14; IV.17.4–6; V.1.1, 16; 15.3 (an important passage); VI.11.82 (view already current in Christian polemic, cf. Origen, *Cels.* 7.3, but given unusual force by Eusebius).

[24] *PE* IV.1.10–11; 2.5; demons and charlatans: V.21.5 (on the authority of Oenomaus of Gadara); 26.5.

[25] *PE* V.1.3; 16.4; 17.11.

[26] *PE* V.17.6–9 (death of Pan under Tiberius); 13 (general statement), cf. IV.17.4; the theme was amply developed by Theodoret, *Affect.* X.11.43–8; *PE* IV.2.3; V.1.2–3 (silence of oracles).

[27] *PE* IV.2.13; V.27.5; cf. V.16. Delphi and Claros are described as dead in IV.2.8, and in V.16 (quoting Porphyry, *Phil.* II, pp. 172–3) as the only still surviving oracles, along with Didyma.

[28] Eusebius, *PE* IV.2.11; *VC* II.50; *HE* IX.3; Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 11.6.

[29] On the dishonest cunning of the Fathers in this connection, see my 'Fate of oracles' (op. cit. (n. 6), 278).

[30] J. Bidez, following Zeller, regarded the *Letter to Anebo* as a work from Porphyry's post-Plotinian period (*Vie de Porphyre, le philosophe néo-platonicien* (1913), 80–1), and placed the *De Mysteriis* after Porphyry's death (ibid., 87). A. R. Sodano, *Porfirio, Lettera ad Anebo* (1958), xxxii–xxxvi, on the other hand, dates the text between 263 and 268 on internal evidence. I assume both the *Letter to Anebo* and the *De Mysteriis* to be contemporary, and date them *c.* 300 or later, cf. above, n. 13.

[31] Porphyry, *Ep. Aneb.* I.2a.

[32] ibid. I.1c.

[33] ibid. I.3b.

[34] ibid. I.3c.

[35] ibid. I.3d.

[36] ibid. I.4.

[37] ibid. II.1.

[38] ibid. II.2.

[39] ibid. II.3a.

[40] ibid. II.3a

[41] ibid. II.4, 5.

If such remarks were feasted upon by Eusebius and his intellectual progeny,[42] they do not seem to have upset Iamblichus, who was not in the least angry at such irreverent questions. Occasionally, it is true, he was shocked by Porphyry's naïvety, especially when the latter echoed Christian propaganda unawares;[43] but on the whole he was pleased to receive the *Letter to Anebo*. For Iamblichus, like Plotinus, was above all a teacher. Consequently he set out patiently to elucidate obscure points, answer questions, dispel doubts. What resulted is a treatise on divination.

The De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum

What Iamblichus does in the *De Mysteriis* is to produce a theoretical framework by reference to which every known divinatory practice can be classified or rejected. This he does as an expert and fully confident Platonist, who believes in the essential, though incredibly complex, unity of the cosmos.[44] To him duality, let alone plurality, is a figure of speech, not a way of being; for being exists in unity (ἑνοειδῶς) and can only be comprehended by a simple act of intellection (μονοειδῶς), rather than by analytical thinking.[45] Thus, according to Iamblichus, the gods, demons, angels, rulers, heroes, souls, and whatever other powers are mentioned by philosophers, and currently believed to be used in divination, symbolize stages in man's spiritual progress towards or away from being and should under no circumstances be envisaged topographically, as linked with particular areas of the cosmos.[46] 'Such a division is false, while unbridled hunting after qualities is unreasonable',[47] exclaims Iamblichus. And yet, when answering specific points, he has no choice but to play the game of analysis and treat plurality as if it truly existed.[48] But then, he specifies he speaks 'philosophically', for otherwise Porphyry's questions would remain unanswered; at other times, he speaks 'theologically'; finally, there are moments when Iamblichus suspends thought and speaks 'theurgically'.[49]

This tripartite division of method corresponds to different approaches to divination, and enables Iamblichus to analyse and classify the various aspects of contemporary practice. Theoretically μαντική (prophecy) is consubstantial with the One. It has nothing to do with human dispositions and habits, and is not an art, but a wholly divine manifestation to which all psychological and bodily attributes as well as the peculiarities of specific places are subjected.[50] Yet, being co-extensive with God, the gift of prophecy is also present in the cosmos, and hence inherent in the divisible.

Only by negating himself can man become aware of the divine spirit within him and reveal it to others;[51] for if, while God is manifesting Himself in such a manner, either the soul or the body of the prophet intervenes, the oracle becomes disturbed and falsified,[52] the occurrence of passion and materiality at any stage of the prophetic action being fatal.[53] By making man alone responsible for the distortion of originally truthful oracles, Iamblichus frontally attacked the spatial conception of spirituality typified by Porphyry, which accepted that in their journey towards the earth the god's utterances might easily fall under the influence of the stars.[54]

Iamblichus' optimistic assertion that any cause of disruption in divination can be controlled by the man who has fully surrendered himself to God is at the root of the important division he makes of prophecy into divine and human.[55] He never tires of repeating that true prophecy is the gift of the gods alone, yet he also recognizes that in the course of history mankind invented many ways of foretelling the future, such as by the flight of birds, the study

[42] See above, n. 22; also *PE* v.10; vi.5.1; xiv.10.2; Theodoret, *Affect.* 1.48; iii.66–8; x.11ff.; it is worth noting that Theodoret, *Affect.* x.42, attributes to Porphyry a hostile attitude to divination, mentioning him in one breath with Diogenianus the Epicurean.

[43] *Ep. Aneb.* II.7 and *Myst.* III.31.179; *Ep. Aneb.* II.8 and *Myst.* IV.11; *Ep. Aneb.* II.18 and *Myst.* X.2, 4.

[44] A point made clearly by Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 45.

[45] *Myst.* I.3, 10.34.

[46] ibid. I.5, 8.28.

[47] ibid. I.8.29.

[48] Thus on the typology of apparitions, ibid. II.3.7off.

[49] ibid. I.2.7. For a good analysis of theurgy and the theurgic 'way', as also of Porphyry's intellectual limitations, see G. Shaw, 'Theurgy: rituals of unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus', *Traditio* 41 (1985), 17–27.

[50] *Myst.* III.1.

[51] ibid. III.4, 5, 7, 11, 31.176.

[52] ibid. III.7.115: θορυβώδη γίγνονται καὶ ψευδῆ τὰ μαντεῖα καὶ ὁ ἐνθουσιασμὸς οὐκέτι ἀληθὴς ὑπάρχει οὐδὲ γνησίως θεῖος.

[53] *Myst.* IV.10: ἡ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τόλμα καὶ παράβασις τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τάξεως παρατρέπει τὰ καλὰ καὶ νόμιμα.

[54] *Phil.* II, p. 170.

[55] Τεχνικῶς — θεουργικῶς: *Myst.* III.28.170; IX.3.276; X.5. In this, as in much else, Iamblichus proves himself to be an orthodox Platonist; cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 244cd and Plotinus III.1.3.13–16.

of entrails or the observation of the stars.[56] These methods are all fallacious, however, for they are the result of human science, which can at best only make conjectures about the future by using the clues of universal sympathy.[57]

But the distinction between human and divine prophecy is a fragile one. Just as the divine gift can be disorientated at any point and never reach its destination if it encounters violence or passion,[58] so too matter, when used by an expert with a holy disposition, can activate the divine word. This apparent paradox is explained in the light of Iamblichus' understanding of cult and theurgy, two inextricably entwined themes.

For the master of Apamea prayer and sacrifice, which are the very foundations of cult, are divine gifts to humanity;[59] they are rafts, so to speak, on which man can traverse more easily the ocean of diversity towards his goal of union with God. And, though it is possible that at the twilight of their lives a few men may indeed reach moral maturity and spiritual perfection and pass beyond the need of prayer, having already overcome their dependence on the body, the rest of mankind needs a routine of ritual.[60] If, suggests Iamblichus, man is ever to leave the world of diversity for that of unity, he needs the starting point which is provided by cult. Religion (θρησκεία) is not a matter of human convention, but a divine gift.[61] In the context of this general thesis Iamblichus made a strong Cratylian point when he held against Malchus–Porphyry that in religion names cannot be translated because they lose something of their essence, which forms an inalienable part of the cosmos.[62] If distorted therefore through translation or otherwise, names injure divine harmony and can no longer operate as pass-words in the soul's upward journey.[63] In similar fashion religious music, whose origin is no less divine, helps the soul to ascend by reminding it of the music of the spheres.[64]

Having stressed the importance of ritual, Iamblichus devotes much effort to combating the common belief — abundantly illustrated through the magical papyri — that in theurgy the operant uses his knowledge of cosmic structures in order to bring down the god and obtain oracles.[65] 'How is it that the gods allow themselves to serve the vilest of magicians?', Porphyry had enquired in a passage that was feasted upon by Christian polemic.[66] Iamblichus solved the puzzle by anchoring himself on the Platonic principle of divine immobility and immutability: when the operant calls on the god, he explained, the god illuminates him with an excess of energy (περιουσίᾳ δυνάμεως), without of course descending in any physical sense. The divine δύναμις, manifest at that moment in the form of light, is perceptible to the theurgist who remains conscious.[67] Subsequently Iamblichus analyses for Porphyry's sake the wide variety of canonical methods by which light can be drawn for the purpose of divination.[68] Yet in his desire to convey more fully what happens during theurgical divination, he also uses the familiar Platonic image of the ascent of the soul: if 'the human soul is held by one image and darkened on all sides by the body',[69] its nostalgia, heightened by ritual, may indeed set it on the road of ethical and spiritual progress, symbolized by an upward motion in the course of which among other things the future is revealed to it.[70]

This is how Iamblichus conceives theurgy. In fact theurgical divination is presented by him not so much as an end in itself, but as a stage on the way to mystic union, a goal which may be reached either consciously or unconsciously. In this connection Iamblichus contrasts with the sober theurgist, who watches grace descend upon him,[71] the familiar figure of the prophet

[56] *Myst.* III.15; VI.4; IX.3.276.
[57] ibid. III.16, 27.
[58] ibid. IV.10.
[59] ibid. V.25; I.15; cf. VII.5. Here lies the essential difference between Plotinus and Iamblichus: having a more pessimistic view of humanity, the latter laid more emphasis on ritual than Plotinus, who expected the gods to come to him (Porphyry, *Plot.* 10.37–8). This could be because Plotinus believed that there is an element in our soul for ever unaffected by passion (*Enn.* III.4.3.22ff.; IV.1); against such optimism and spiritual autarky, Iamblichus reminded his readers that the charioteer of the soul cannot help sinking at some point, filling his pair of horses with lameness and moulting (*In Ti.* fr. 87).
[60] *Myst.* V.20.228: ὀψὲ, 22: ὀψιαίτατα ... καὶ ἐν δυσμαῖς τοῦ βίου, cf. 15.219, 18; I.11–15. On the stages of prayer, V.26.237–8.
[61] ibid. VII.4.
[62] ibid. VII.5. The Platonic view as defined in the *Cratylus* and finalized by Proclus (*In Parm.* 851.8) is that words are ἀγάλματα τῶν πραγμάτων λογικά. Disregarding this, the Tyrian Malchus had translated his name into Greek as Πορφύριος and allowed Amelius to call him Βασιλεύς.
[63] *Myst.* I.15.
[64] ibid. III.9.
[65] ibid. III.17.139, 18.143: οὐ κατάγεται τὸ θεῖον εἰς τὰ σημεῖα τῆς μαντικῆς.
[66] *Ep. Aneb.* II.3a; cf. above, n. 43.
[67] *Myst.* III.14, 17; V.23.233.
[68] ibid. III.14; V.26.
[69] ibid. III.20.148.
[70] ibid. III.20.
[71] This is an important theme in Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers*: Sosipatra was σωφρόνως ἐνθουσιῶσα, VI.8.1.

or prophetess who, falling into a trance, exchanges animal existence for a more divine life.[72] With reference to such states, Porphyry had wondered whether prophetic trance was not caused by some sort of mental disturbance.[73] To this irreverent remark Iamblichus opposed the two kinds of frenzy to which men may be subjected: ecstasy caused by passion, which is against nature (παρὰ φύσιν) and abases the soul, and ecstasy caused by God, which is beyond nature (ὑπὲρ τὴν φύσιν) and lifts the soul up.[74]

This second type of ecstasy, however, can only be induced by absolute virtue which causes utter forgetfulness of the self and absorption into God. But at that point Iamblichus conceded to Porphyry and to the magically-minded prophets a point which has given rise to much misunderstanding about his own view of theurgic divination: it is possible, he admitted, to obtain divine messages by manipulating the laws of nature,[75] but then, he warned his correspondent, divination becomes a technique which does not bring happiness.[76]

III. THE *DE MYSTERIIS* AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

Astrology and Private Oracles

As well as a metaphysical text of universal value, the *De Mysteriis* can serve to the historian as a highly critical guide of divinatory practice at the close of the third century. Iamblichus' remarks on horoscope-casting — a discipline which he places at the lowest level of the astrological pyramid — are severe, for, like Plotinus, he wishes to castigate this extremely popular practice, which had adepts in all social and intellectual strata.[77] 'Your views on the subject do not seem to me either to be consistent or to bear any connection with the truth'[78] is his prelude, as Iamblichus begins to disentangle the threads of Porphyry's theories on fate, personal demons and horoscope-casting, all matters of great interest in philosophical circles, and central issues in the controversy between pagans and Christians. In the process, Iamblichus proves a stronger logician than Porphyry, who emerges as a man avid for knowledge but possessing a mind only superficially critical, rushing to analysis and classification before establishing whether his material is homogeneous. Thus Iamblichus shows that, when Porphyry uses astrological methods to find out about the personal demon, he is in fact attempting to grasp divine essence by applying human science.[79] For the teacher of Apamea the divinatory art (μαντικὴ τέχνη) with its computation of tables is a useless technique based on the externals of astrology; only divine prophecy (ἡ θεία μαντική) can reveal the identity of the personal demon,[80] a power above fate who can indeed by the study and practice of theurgy be eventually turned into a god.[81] For this to happen, however, the prerequisite is absolute virtue.

As well as contrasting astrology with divine prophecy, Iamblichus distinguishes it from astronomy, a science given by the gods. But in its historical course astronomy (for which the term used is μαθηματική) suffered at the hands of men who, almost everywhere, spoiled the divine gift by creating a pseudo-science, based on the absurd assumption that man's divine nature can be ruled by cosmic powers inferior to itself.[82] Indeed if it were not for some Chaldaean experts and Egyptian priests, who still practised the god-sent discipline in its genuine form, the lessons of astronomy would have been lost to humanity.[83]

By splitting astronomy into a science and a pseudo-science, which extended the power of fate to regions free from it such as man's divine self, Iamblichus solved an important problem of morals and metaphysics much in the way Origen had done, and was therefore in full

[72] *Myst.* III.3: οὐδὲ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς.
[73] *Ep. Aneb.* II.5c.
[74] *Myst.* III.25.159.
[75] ibid. IV.10.
[76] ibid. X.4; cf. IV.10.
[77] Astrology and public life in the early Empire, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (1979), 119–26; for general belief in, G. Neugebauer and H. B. van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (1959), *passim*, esp. 176–90. For Plotinus' criticism of the discipline, III.1.5; in II.3.3 he condemns astrology on the grounds that its principles are incompatible with those of astronomy, a true science. For the problematic passage II.3. 12–32, see A. H. Armstrong in his edition of the *Enneads* II (1966), 54–5. For Plotinus' punishment for his attack on fate and astrology, F. Maternus, *Math.* I.7.14–22.
[78] *Myst.* IX.3.275.
[79] ibid. IX.1–2.
[80] ibid. IX.3.276.
[81] ibid. IV.2.184; VIII.7; IX.6. For the case of Plotinus, Porphyry, *Plot.* 10.
[82] *Myst.* IX.4.
[83] ibid. VII.3; VIII.4.

agreement with Eusebius.[84] His view, however, did not prove influential. In the following centuries astrology and its practical applications continued to thrive, not least among Iamblichus' self-appointed adepts.[85]

Porphyry had also wondered whether it was possible to obtain truthful answers from home-made oracles based on magical symbols.[86] Concerning this practice Iamblichus was categorical:

> This bad and superficial type of divination, which is accessible to the great majority of men, uses falsehood and intolerable fraud; far from causing the presence of any god, it produces a movement of the soul which attracts but a dim and ghostly reflection of the gods, which, because of its very debility, is sometimes disturbed by wicked demonic spirits.[87]

The facile practice that Iamblichus censures in this passage was widespread, as witnessed by many sources including amulets and the random collection of magical papyri now available to us.[88] Inexpensive, discreet and mobile, the various methods of telling the future by the use of magical symbols (χαρακτῆρες) flourished, especially after divination was officially banned. Besides, thanks to persistent misunderstanding, these methods enjoyed the authority of tradition. Believing that he was echoing Iamblichan views, the emperor Julian, for instance, encouraged belief in the intrinsic sanctity of magical characters,[89] and urged his friend and collaborator, Salutius, to do the same in a work that can be described as a pagan catechism.[90] With such a pedigree, divination by characters could scarcely disappear. Indeed our late antique and medieval literary sources are studded with divinatory scandals of this type, thus demonstrating the persistence of a practice whose appeal proved more durable than religious dogma.[91]

Divination by Statues

According to Egyptian belief, the gods resided in their statues.[92] This belief and the hopes it stimulated are at the root of several theories of divination, one of which claimed that not all statues can serve as divine abodes, but only those manufactured in a certain fashion. Reported by Porphyry as a matter of fact, this theory seems to have annoyed Iamblichus; 'why should one exchange true existence for idols', he wondered, 'and descend from the first beings to the very last?'[93] Against Porphyry's view, that there are craftsmen who can produce statues able to attract gods for the purpose of divination,[94] Iamblichus argues that nothing made of matter can be inherently divine, and that a statue is merely an artificial mixture of many heterogeneous forces and elements, participating in a more divine world in its aesthetic dimension only.[95]

[84] Origen, *Philoc.* 23 and Eusebius, *PE* VI.11. For the important distinction between astronomy, a science, and astrology, a pseudo-science, Plotinus II.3.3. For the semantic evolution of the term, see Liddell-Scott-Jones (1940), *s.v.* ἀστρολογία.

[85] *C Th* IX.16.8; 12; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 178–9. Eusebius, Bishop of Emesa and a pupil of Eusebius, lost his see for dabbling in astrology: Socrates, *HE* II.9; Sozomen, *HE* III.6. Basil of Caesarea, *Hex.* VI.5, faces the practice of astrology as a major social evil; G. Dagron and J. Rougé, 'Trois horoscopes de voyages en mer (5^{e} siècle après J.-C.)', *REB* 40 (1982), 118–19. For Marinus casting Proclus' horoscope, *Vita Procli* 35.

[86] *Ep. Aneb.* II.2a: ἐπὶ χαρακτήρων στάντες.

[87] *Myst.* III.13.

[88] Campbell Bonner, 'Magical amulets', *HTR* 39 (1946), 39–40. *P. Mag.* I.150–82, for a detailed description of an ἰδιωτικὸν μαντεῖον with characters; 1.262–78 and V.305–68, a clear account of the use of characters for magical purposes; VII. *passim* (1–148, a Homer oracle); X.36–50, XI.1–11, literally standing on characters, as suggested by the Porphyrian text. Cf. also Porphyry, *Phil.* I, pp. 137–8, 164.

[89] *Or.* VII. 216c.

[90] *De Diis* 15, and P. Athanassiadi, *Julian: an Intellectual Biography*^{2} (1992), 154.

[91] On magically obtained oracles: Ammianus XXIX.29–32; Eunapius, *VS* VII.6.3, cf. VI.6.1–3; Synesius, *Insomn.* XII.144a–145b; Zacharias Scholasticus, *V.Sev.*, PO 2, 57–70, 90–1; John of Ephesus, *HE* 27–34. By contrast, Plotinus, in whose spirit Iamblichus speaks, defines the art of divination as the spontaneous ἀνάγνωσις *φυσικῶν* γραμμάτων (III.3.6), that is the reading of signs which are ubiquitous, as he explains in another passage: μεστὰ δὲ πάντα σημείων καὶ σοφός τις ὁ μαθὼν ἐξ ἄλλου ἄλλο (II.3.7).

[92] See J. Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (1952), 64ff.; I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The imperial chamber at Luxor', *DOP* 29 (1975), 242–3. The ferrying of the statue of Isis from Philae to the land of the Blemmyes and the Nobadae at fixed intervals for the giving of oracles is still attested in the mid-fifth century: Priscus, *FHG* IV.100 (= Blockley, fr. 27).

[93] *Myst.* III.28.167.

[94] *Ep. Aneb.* II.6B; cf. *Phil.* I, pp. 130–4. For practical adaptations, see J. R. Harris, 'Iconography and context: *ab oriente ad occidentem*', in M. Henig and A. King (eds), *Pagan Gods and Shrines of the Roman Empire* (1986), 175.

[95] *Myst.* III.28–9.

Iamblichus' refutation of Porphyry's view does not seem to have had any effect, at least in theurgical circles in Egypt. The sixth-century Athenian diadochus, Damascius, reports as a sign of spiritual perfection that Heraiscus of Alexandria could tell the difference between a divine and a lifeless statue even at a distance.[96]

Another theory which originated in the belief that divinity may reside in statues was that of εἴσκρισις, that is of the ritual purification of a statue so that it receives God for the purpose of prophecy. As we have seen, Iamblichus categorically denied that divinity may be drawn to a statue; yet this did not prevent the doctrine and practice of εἴσκρισις from becoming co-terminous with theurgy.[97] Among Iamblichus' successors at one remove we find Maximus of Ephesus using statues of gods in order to perform miracles. Iamblichus had warned that 'one must apprehend the nature of this miracle-mongering and under no circumstances perform it or believe in it!'[98] Yet one of his assiduous readers and warmest admirers could face Maximus as god on earth without sensing any contradiction in his allegiance.[99] As we learn from Eunapius, it was precisely a story about how Maximus had animated a statue of Hecate that set Julian in pursuit of him, despite both the danger that this act involved for his personal safety, and Iamblichus' verdict about technicians in divination: 'never will any divine light shine upon such souls!'[100] Julian, among many others, chose to forget this brief sentence.

From Maximus onwards, divination by statues became standard Neoplatonic practice, and emphasis was laid on the technicalities of the process which often involved the use of 'characters', the combination of the two methods having already been advocated by Porphyry.[101] Ironically, far from arresting the course of the practice, Iamblichus' condemnation of statue prophecy — or what has come to be called 'theurgical divination' — accelerated it by lending it the prestige of his name. This could indeed happen because Iamblichus' tenuous distinction between virtue and technical expertise — in other words, the opposition of theurgy to magic — could be understood and enforced only by another holy man. But sadly, neither Julian nor Proclus nor any of the impressionable or scholastic minds who claimed descent from Iamblichus were able to grasp and apply the criterion of holiness set by him, any more than they were in a position to see that Iamblichus' hierarchization of the cosmos was but a didactic device.

Public Oracles and Official Divination

Based partly on post-Iamblichan Neoplatonic evidence, partly on Christian polemic, modern scholarship understandably claims that theurgy and magic are disciplines resting on the same presuppositions and using some of the same methods in pursuit of different ends.[102] Such a view of theurgy would have horrified Iamblichus, who in his letter to Porphyry went to great lengths to argue that theurgy is the way of the wholly virtuous; indeed, it is only because he saw it as the very flower of divination that he tried so hard to dissociate it both from fraudulent practices and from the compromised mainstream oracular tradition. In the former attempt he failed, though it should be seen as a measure of the influence of the *De Mysteriis* that the misunderstood figure of the Iamblichan theurgist gained such currency in subsequent times. But in the latter effort he was successful, though it must be pointed out that this was an easier task: the great oracular establishments were on the way to extinction and, sensing this, Iamblichus reserved no place of honour for them in his scheme.[103] Thus, to Porphyry's

[96] *Isid.* fr. 174.

[97] See above, p. 119. Εἴσκρισις by the help of χαρακτῆρες: Hermias, *In Phdr.* 87, 4ff.; Porphyry's question endorsed by Proclus: *In Ti.* III.6.9ff.; ritually purified statues symbolizing the presence of the gods: Proclus, *In Ti.* I. 273. 11ff.; statues becoming animate: ibid. III.6.12; *Theol. Plat.* I.29. *In Ti.* III.155.18ff. contains a straightforward statement that the god can be constrained to enter a statue and render oracles.

[98] *Myst.* III.30.175. For Maximus animating a statue of Hecate, see Eunapius, *VS* VII.2.6–10. For violence used against the gods, cf. ibid. VII.3.10–12: ἐκβιάζεσθαι τὴν τοῦ θείου φύσιν ἄχρις ἂν ἐπικλίνῃ πρὸς τὸν θεραπεύοντα.

[99] Julian, *Ep.* 12 (Bidez); *Or.* XI.157c: in Iamblichus there is to be found τὸ τέλος ... τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ... σοφίας. On Maximus, *Ep.* 89a.452a; 89b.298b.

[100] *Myst.* III.29.173.

[101] *Phil.* I, p. 137; see also n. 97; Marinus, *Procl.* 28; Psellus, *Ep.* 187 in Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη* V (1876), 474.

[102] 'The procedures of theurgy were broadly similar to those of vulgar magic' (n. 73), claims Dodds in his influential article (above, n. 8), an axiom which still seems to be universally accepted (cf. e.g. G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 126ff.).

[103] cf. above, n. 6.

questions about what was happening at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, Iamblichus answered with the boldness of the intelligent reformer. To his mind, these places were sacred not theologically, but historically, because of an original association with the god: the holy water, the divine staff or the fiery element, as the case might be, played a preparatory role in the dispensation of the divine word; they were useful accessories, sanctioned by tradition, and not crucial elements in the wielding of prophecy.[104]

In his attitude to much that pertained to traditional oracular practice, Iamblichus gives the impression that he differed little from his Christian counterparts. And just as, rather than lamenting the fate of the great prophetic sites of the ancient world, he proclaimed their irrelevance to the core of divination, he likewise dismissed as mere craftsmanship some very ancient and popular divinatory methods, such as augury by the flight of birds and the observation of animal entrails.[105] Besides the emperor Julian, who here too did not prove a very careful reader of Iamblichus, there were many others who continued to honour these deeply-rooted practices in the Mediterranean world.[106] For Iamblichus, however, these technicalities were no better than the various methods of popular magic which sought to reveal the future by using corpses of animals.[107] Soon, bishops and emperors were to join their voices with Iamblichus' in denunciation of these squalid practices, which of course never went out of fashion, since they encouraged people to think that they would discover what would happen in everyday life, as Iamblichus had pertinently pointed out.[108]

Unlike his Christian counterparts, however, Iamblichus was not an intellectual snob. For him, truthfulness and falsehood in the spiritual sphere were not dependent on the simplistic scheme of learned versus popular religion.[109] Just as his view of the divine cosmos was built on the assumption of homogeneity and not of spatial hierarchization (yet a homogeneity that could at any moment be compromised by the intrusion of foreign elements),[110] so too the sphere of knowledge did not appear to him as a tiered structure, with truth inhabiting the level of learned opinion and suffering a progressive weakening as it associated with more popular forms of learning. Truth for Iamblichus could be found at all levels of religious experience, for it was a spiritual, not a merely intellectual entity. Thus he argued that Etruscan divination and street magic were equally ungodly disciplines, while theurgic divination and oniromancy, despite their occasional misuse at the hands of mortals, had kept their divine core intact.

Oniromancy

Iamblichus lived in a world where prophecy by dreams was both traditional and popular.[111] He fully acknowledged the fact and joined in the discussion which, since Aristotle's day, had divided 'onirologists' into believers and unbelievers. Subscribing to the former category, he attempted to dispel Porphyry's doubts by having recourse to the current distinction between predictive dreams (ὄνειροι) and mere fantasies (ἐνύπνια). While the former, for which Iamblichus provides a full typology, are caused by the gods, the latter are a creation of the passions and should therefore be omitted from a serious discussion of mantic dreams, for any success they may have is purely coincidental.[112] Iamblichus' most interesting pages on prophetic dreams are those in which he describes how they occur, and offers a full 'theurgic' interpretation of their function in the cosmos.[113] As a natural sequel to this section,

[104] *Myst.* III.11; cf. III.22.154. On the transfer of the numinous from institutions to individuals in late antiquity see now P. Athanassiadi, 'Philosophers and oracles: shifts of authority in late paganism', Byzantion 62 (1992), 45–62.

[105] See above, n. 56.

[106] Ammianus XXV.4.17. *CTh* XVI.10.12.1 (A.D. 392).

[107] *Myst.* VI.1.4.

[108] ibid. VI.4: περὶ σμικρῶν τε καὶ ἐφημέρων πραγμάτων. Cf. above, n. 102, and *CTh* IX.16.4–9; XVI.7.2; XVI.10.7, 9; *CJ* I.11.7.

[109] A distinction imposed on us by Christian polemic (e.g. Eusebius, *PE* III.14.1–2) and propagated by modern prejudice, as in R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981), 72; for a corrective view, R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), 135–6. On the distinction between the 'Roman' and the 'Christian' use of the term *superstitio* in the fourth century, see J. Gascou, 'Le rescrit d'Hispellum', *MEFR* LXXIX (1967), 652–5.

[110] See above, nn. 52, 53.

[111] Abundant evidence for dream oracles from the fifth/fourth centuries B.C. to the third/fourth centuries A.D., with the second century A.D. particularly well represented, is to be found in F. T. van Straten, 'Daikrates' dream: a votive relief from Kos, and some kat'onar dedications', *BABesh* 51 (1976), 1–38; for the third century see P. Veyne, 'Une évolution du paganisme gréco-romain: injustice et piété des dieux, leurs ordres ou "oracles"', *Latomus* 45 (1986), 259–83. See also below, n. 134.

[112] *Myst.* III.2 and Artemidorus I.1 (Pack) p. 3.

[113] *Myst.* III.2–3, 23.

he encourages incubation and, just as elsewhere he makes another province of human science, astronomy, solely dependent on revelation,[114] here he proclaims medicine to be the fruit of mantic dreams.[115]

Iamblichus' emphasis on oniromancy was fully vindicated by historical developments. While one by one the great oracular centres were falling silent, those shrines where prophecy was dispensed through incubation continued to thrive. Indeed, such was their popularity that in many cases they were allowed to go into abeyance only once their functions had been assumed by the Church.

An excellent example of this is provided by the ancient oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius in Cilician Seleucia, which was of such importance in Iamblichus' day that both the emperor Aurelian and Queen Zenobia felt the need to consult it as they prepared for their struggle.[116] As Apollo's prestige refused to dwindle, the Christians opened a rival oracle nearby some time before the end of the fourth century. The purpose that the imported martyr Thecla was expected to serve was twofold: on the supernatural level her relics would neutralize the demonic power of the pagan prophet, while in practical terms Thecla would appropriate to herself Apollo's clientèle. This indeed happened, but it took more than three generations for the transfer to be effected.

In his *Miracles of Saint Thecla*, an anonymous rhetor, active in the second and third quarters of the fifth century, has left a detailed account of the trickling of influence from the pagan to the Christian dream-oracle. The variety of ethnic and geographic origin, social status, intellectual level and age-group of the dreamers of Seleucia in this text indicates not only an atmosphere of religious ambivalence, but also universal belief in dreams and their prophetic/healing function.[117]

But the purpose of the anonymous author was quite different and though, by reporting the fruit of a life-time's observation, he justified Iamblichus' insight unawares, his real aim was to convince everybody of the truth of Eusebius' thesis on pagan divination. By having recourse to the same old examples, the author exposes in his introduction the fraudulence and wickedness of the pagan oracular tradition, and shows throughout how Sarpedonius Apollo was a pathetic demon frightened out of existence by Thecla's superior power.[118] Eventually he was. But the important theme remains that Thecla of Iconium made her reputation in the Byzantine world as a sender of prophetic dreams,[119] a skill that she acquired in Seleucia.

In similar circumstances, though with considerably greater difficulty, the obscure saints Cyrus and John served their apprenticeship at the shrine of Isis at Menuthis. Long after Bishop Cyril sent their relics to the Alexandrine suburb with the intent of ousting the goddess, she kept her supremacy unchallenged.[120] As late as the 480s Isis was in a position to summon her faithful from afar to her incubatory centre at Menuthis merely by appearing in their sleep;[121] indeed, at that date her establishment could still boast a staff of several priests and dream-interpreters, largely thanks to the venality of the local Christian community.[122]

The process of transfer of power was set in motion at Menuthis only after the dislocation of its crypto-pagan community. Yet, even after twenty camels loaded with sacred objects

[114] See above, n. 82.

[115] *Myst.* III.3; cf. Philostratus, *VA* III.44; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 163–4 (on Thessalus).

[116] Zosimus 1.57.2–4. On the history of the site, see G. Dagron, *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle* (1978), 55–73, 85–8, and H. Hellenkemper and F. Hild, *Neue Forschungen in Kilikien* (1986), 44–7.

[117] Thecla appears to Jews and pagans, *Mir. Intr.* ll. 91–2, and bestows her blessings on them, *Mir.* 14, 17, 18, 39, 40; those who ask for prophecy are πάντες ἄνθρωποι· ὅσα γὰρ ἔθνη, ὅσα γένη, ὅσαι κῶμαι, ὅσοι ἀγροὶ καὶ οἶκοι: *Mir.* 10, ll. 34–5, cf. *Mir. Intr.* ll. 84–91; she is perpetually dashing all over the place, like Asclepius, *Mir.* 12, ll. 100–101; her yearly festival attracts people from the whole area, including Cyprus, *Mir.* 15, 26, 29, 33, 34, and even rhetorical contests take place, *Mir.* 41; but her church is always thronged with the sick of all ages, *Mir.* 24, 38, while the whole suburb has become an informal submonastic refuge, *Mir.* 43, 46. The point concerning the universality of dream divination was explicitly made by Synesius of Cyrene, *Insomn.* XIII.145d–146a.

[118] *Mir. Intr.*, *Mir.* 1, cf. 11, 18, 40.

[119] For Zeno's vision, in which St Thecla prophesied that he would regain the throne, his subsequent campaign and his construction on the site of a μέγιστον τέμενος, see Evagrius, *HE* III.8 and Dagron, op. cit. (n. 116), 59–63.

[120] Cyril of Alexandria, *De Cyro et Johanne*, *PG* 77, 1101: ὅτι τὰ μέρη ταῦτα ἔχρηζεν ἰατρῶν θεραπευόντων διὰ θεοῦ ... καὶ χριστιανοὶ ὄντες ἐσφάλλοντο, διὰ τοῦτο ἀναγκαίως ἐζητήσαμεν ἁγίων μαρτύρων λείψανα. 1105: ἐρχέσθωσαν εἰς ἀληθινὸν καὶ ἀκαπήλευτον ἰατρεῖον· οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἡμῖν ὀνείρατα πλάττεται· οὐδεὶς λέγει τοῖς ἐρχομένοις· Εἴρηκεν ἡ Κυρά (i.e. Isis)· ποίησον τὸ καὶ τό.

[121] cf. the case of Asclepiodotus of Alexandria, living in Aphrodisias in Caria, when he received an order in his sleep to go to Menuthis, Zacharias, *Vita Severi* 17.

[122] ibid. 18, 22–31 and Cyril of Alexandria, op. cit. (n. 120), *PG* 77, 1105.

arrived at Alexandria and the idols were festively burned, the renown of the Menuthian Isis remained unblemished abroad, as the bearer of the synodal letter by which Peter Mongus asked Nonnus of Aphrodisias to publicize the matter was corrupted by the pagan network in Caria, and the letter never reached its destination.[123]

If abroad people could still at the close of the fifth century enjoy the nocturnal visitations of Isis, at Menuthis itself pilgrims came increasingly under the sway of Cyrus and John. Indeed the monk Sophronius, to whom we owe the impressive list of miracles performed by the two saints around the end of the sixth century, spent many a night incubating at their shrine before his eyesight was restored to him so that, as Patriarch of Jerusalem, he could enjoy the doubtful privilege of seeing the city fall to the Muslims.[124]

At Seleucia and Menuthis then, Apollo and Isis kept the oracular tradition going against all odds for so long that in the end the Christian establishment had to suspend pretence and adopt it. More obscurely, at Abydus, 'in the depths of the Thebaid',[125] another ancient dream-oracle had been functioning without interruption since Pharaonic times and, despite its relative remoteness, it went on enjoying international fame long after paganism was officially banned.[126] In a period of a thousand years the identity of the divine prophet changed twice, and the second time the Hellenistic *Erzatz* Sarapis was supplanted by the increasingly popular Bes, the dream-giver. People from all walks of life addressed their enquiries to Bes, often by correspondence, though the most pious came and slept at the shrine in the hope of obtaining prophetic dreams.[127] As an articulate pilgrim from Caesarea Panias in Galilee put it:

> I have often slept here and had truthful dreams,
> I, Harpocras, inhabitant of the holy city of Panias;
> A priest myself, the priest Coprias' beloved offspring,
> To Bes the diviner, in infinite gratitude.[128]

Like Harpocras, people returned to repeat their experience, and told others of the reliability of Bes.[129] When in the fifth century the Thebaid was filled with monasteries, Bes continued to be all-powerful at Abydus and it is not unlikely that Christians too came to sleep at his oracle.[130] What is certain is that, more than a century after the death of Theodosius I, the belief was widespread that, if a hostile person dared approach the temple of Bes, he would be assaulted by the demon and handicapped for life. This information comes from the very fragmentary Coptic *Vita* of Apa Moses of Abydus, the founder of a monastery in the region, who one evening, after the repeated entreaties of his disciples, took seven terrified monks, among whom was the author of our *Vita*, and led them to Abydus to confront Bes. The demon played many tricks on his aggressors, but Apa Moses kept encouraging his monks and, though our text comes to an abrupt end at this point, we are left in no doubt of which way victory went.[131] According to the Eusebian pattern, the wicked demon was annihilated by coming into contact with the power of Christ.

We do not know whether Apa Moses undertook to Christianize Abydus' oniromantic tradition, as his peers in Cilicia and Alexandria had done, yet one suspects that the locals continued for some time to receive Bes' nocturnal visitations. After all 'the laws of the

[123] Zacharias, *V. Sev.* 33–6; for a fuller description of the situation, see R. Herzog, 'Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis', *Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Alterums, Franz Joseph Dölger ... dargeboten* (1939), 117–24. For the eventual Islamization of the dream oracle (re-named in due course Abukir after Aba Cyrus!), see P. Athanassiadi, 'Persecution and response in late paganism: the evidence of Damascius', *JHS* 113 (1993, forthcoming).

[124] Latest edition by N. Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata de Sofronio. Contribución al estudio de la incubatio cristiana* (1975). For the history of the site, see P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pelerinages d'Orient* (1985), 318–19 and Athanassiadi, op. cit. (n. 123).

[125] Ammianus XIX.12.3.

[126] P. Perdrizet and G. Lefebvre, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos* (1919), xix–xxiii.

[127] For a case of high treason under Constantius II, implicating high officials and intellectuals in Egypt and Syria, who had consulted Bes by correspondence, see Ammianus XIX.12.3–15.

[128] *Memnonion* no. 528.

[129] ibid., no. 489: μάντιν ἀληθέα; no. 492: παναληθῆ, ἄψευστον; no. 493: παναληθῆ; no. 500: πανταληθῆ, ἄψευστον καὶ δι' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης μαρτυρούμενον; no. 503: τὸν πάντων ἀληθῆ; no. 528: ἀληθέας ὀνείρους, together with L. Robert, *Hellenica* XIII, 102.

[130] *Memnonion* no. 524: τὸ προσκύνημα τοῦ Ἰωάννου, who may, of course, be of Jewish extraction.

[131] E. Amélineau, *Mémoires de la mission archéologique française au Caire* IV.2 (1895) fr. VI, pp. 689–90. For the prosperity of paganism in the area in the early sixth century, cf. ibid., 685–6. For the date of Apa Moses, see R.-G. Coquin, 'Christianismes orientaux', *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Ve Section (Sciences religieuses)* 92 (1983–84), 374.

malicious state cannot prevent dream divination nor indeed could they do so, if they wanted to',[132] for the practice is ἐχέμυθος.[133]

The evidence drawn from papyri, amulets, temple inscriptions, the historians and the hagiographers makes it overwhelmingly clear that the commonest method of divination in late antiquity was by dream-oracles.[134] 'When Apollo enters', we read in a Greek papyrus from fifth-century Egypt, 'ask him about what you wish, about divination, oracles by means of epic poetry, sending of dreams, revelations in dreams, interpretation of dreams, incubation (περὶ κατακλίσεως), about all that pertains to the magical experience'.[135] To such an extent were mantic dreams normal in late antiquity that by the end of the fifth century the Alexandrians called their dreams (τοὺς ὀνείρους) oracles (χρησμούς).[136]

Against the complete security attached to oniromancy wielded outside an institutional framework, the famous dream-oracles, however, offered a guarantee of professionalism, and this is what ensured their exceptionally long life. For where God has been known to speak truthfully neither reasoning nor violence can deter man from seeking out this truth. Just as Asclepius was known since classical times to be present at Epidaurus (a circumstance to which we must attribute the prosperity of this sanctuary in late antiquity),[137] so too Apollo, Isis, and Bes (incidentally, the gods most frequently encountered in the magical papyri) were resident at Seleucia, Menuthis, and Abydus respectively and appeared in person to their visitors.[138] Conversely, magically produced dreams run an increased danger of not being truthful as well as of not being precisely remembered, two preoccupations which haunt all magical texts.[139] Here too Iamblichus seems to have provided the clue: though the magician could produce prophetic dreams by following technical instructions, it was only the theurgist who, through his experience of divine union, could guarantee that the ὄνειροι were actually θεόπεμπτοι.[140]

IV. EUSEBIUS, IAMBLICHUS AND THE FUTURE OF PROPHECY

Magic, sublimated under the name of theurgy, and oniromancy are the two aspects through which prophecy prospered in late antiquity, and in this connection both the *Praeparatio Evangelica* and the *De Mysteriis* proved in their different ways strangely visionary and influential texts.

By ignoring the more fluid aspects of divination and concentrating his attack on the great oracular centres, Eusebius narrowed and confused the issue. Whether he did this fully consciously we cannot tell, for it was natural for him to transpose the concept of sacred place from his Judaeo-Christian background into the area of paganism. In similar manner, he exploited the semantic ambiguity of the word *demon*; pretending not to know anything about the history and the actual state of paganism, he imported into his argument an idea from Jewish theology and applied it unequivocally to a dynamic philosophical notion. His vision of contemporary prophecy and of the ways in which it could be exterminated was disarmingly — if dishonestly — simple, and that is why it worked. It was an image eminently graspable and

[132] Synesius, *Insomn.* XII.145c.

[133] ibid., 146a.

[134] cf. above, n. 111; for a systematization of the evidence for inducing dreams, see now S. Eitrem's posthumous study, 'Dreams and divination in magical ritual' (trans. F. Graf), in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera* (1991), 176–87; also A. D. Nock, 'Studies in the Graeco-Roman beliefs of the empire', *JHS* 45 (1925), 95–6 [= *Essays*, 45–6]; L. Robert, *Hellenica* I, 72, n. 1; II, 148; W. Günther, *Ist.Mitt.* 35 (1985), 189–91 (first dedication made at Didyma κατὰ ὄναρ), together with R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), 150–67. The practice was not limited to the lower classes: Dio Cassius LXXIII.23.4; LXXV.3; LXXIX.10.1–2; Herodian II.9.3, 5–7; IV.8.3; VI.8.6. According to tradition, Delphi had originally been a dream-oracle: Euripides, *IT* 1259ff.; cf. Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 59.

[135] P.Mag. I. 328ff.; κατάκλισις may also mean horoscope-casting at the hour a patient takes to his bed, as in Galen 19. 529.

[136] Damascius, *Isid.* E.P. 12.

[137] M. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II (1974[3]), 336–7.

[138] As the order of Isis to Asclepiodotus implies (see above, n. 121). Belief in the god's residence in his main sanctuary was well entrenched, cf. G. Roux, *Delphes: son oracle et ses dieux* (1976), 73; R. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros*, *Philologus Suppl.* XXII.3 (1931), 16, no. 23: at the Asclepieion at Troezen, Aristagora had her head cut off from her body by Asclepius' sons, who then found it impossible to replace it; Asclepius was immediately sent for, but could not come from Epidaurus until the following night, while in the meantime the patient remained headless καὶ ὁ ἰατ<ρ>ὸς ὁρᾶι [ὕπαρ τ]ὰν κεφαλὰν ἀφαιρημέναν τοῦ σώματος. See also the famous passage in Lucian, *Bis Acc.* 1.

[139] cf. the characteristic inscription on an amulet from Rome, *IG* XIV.2413.16: Κύριε δόξης καί χρησμῶν χρημάτισόν μοι ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ταυτῃ ἐπ' ἀληθείᾳ μετὰ μνήμης. Also PMag. VII.664–85 (μαντοσύνην ... ἀληθῆ); 704–26 (βεβαίως καὶ διὰ μνήμης).

[140] *Myst.* III.2.

therefore it could easily be propagated by other polemicists or put into effect by men of action.[141] One should not be surprised to find that both the spirit and the phraseology of all anti-pagan legislation down to the time of Justinian are strongly Eusebian. If Eusebius' vision as it emerges from the *Praeparatio Evangelica* ignored the more fluid forms of divination, it at least provided a formula for their destruction whenever they could be pinned down against an institutional background. The demons who dispensed prophecy were by definition inferior to Christian saints, dead or alive, to whom sooner or later they were bound to abandon their patrimony, as Apollo, Isis, and Bes did. Ultimately the magic of the cross was superior to pagan magic.[142]

Against Eusebius' clear and purposeful, if unsubtle, view of the pagan prophetic tradition and its future, Iamblichus set an infinitely more shaded picture, in fact so shaded that even his own followers did not succeed in grasping its nuances. Of course, as has already been suggested, the main culprit for this was Iamblichus himself, who produced a text often lacking in clarity and in structure. Against his emphatic denial that divinity may be ritually drawn to a statue,[143] his readers could quote, admittedly from another context, the statement that God manifests Himself through pebbles and stones, wood and flour.[144] To his objection to the divinity of statues on the grounds of their materiality,[145] his readers might oppose his statement that even matter can be called pure and divine, providing they overlooked Iamblichus' qualification, that the matter which presents affinities with the divine is not man-shaped, but rather to be found in its raw state in the natural world.[146] Above all, what must have confused Iamblichus' readers is his ambiguous position on the issue of cult. Although he often qualifies his defence of ritual by making its efficacy dependent on virtue, and decries several traditional forms of divination, nevertheless the inescapable impression left even on a careful reader by the *De Mysteriis* is that Iamblichus is a ritualist. As well as his vagueness of exposition, what must have finally contributed towards making his theory of divination either ungraspable or inapplicable by posterity were his austere monism and the ethics of sanctity which underlie it. As much by their teaching as by their example, men like Maximus of Ephesus and his pupil Julian foisted on Iamblichus the image of the magician. This impression was heightened and further spread by the representatives of the revived Athenian School, until the diadochus Proclus — or was it Syrianus? — administered to the saint of Apamea the *coup de grâce*.[147]

Perhaps Iamblichus' greatest misfortune is that none of his pupils produced a biography that could convey something of the man's substance. All that survived was a trivial halo of sanctity, which inspired in his intellectual progeny a mood of religious respect. In tune with the rest, Proclus lavished on Iamblichus his admiration,[148] yet both his methodology and metaphysics are strangely un-Iamblichan. Whereas Iamblichus is sarcastic towards those who stick to the letter of the Platonic text,[149] and has recourse to analysis only as a last resort,[150] Proclus is fascinated by the word,[151] opts gladly for the splitting of hairs, and seems to be happy

[141] See above, n. 23; Theodoret, *Affect.* II.97, for the specific admission that he depends on the *PE*; X.2–3, on demons. For the survival of belief in the demonic power of statues, see C. Mango, 'Antique statuary and the Byzantine beholder', *DOP* 17 (1963), 59–64; and more recently, G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* (1984), 127–50; Averil Cameron and J. Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (1984), 31–4.

[142] For Aphrodite at Gaza, Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 61: (ἐβάσταζον δὲ χριστιανοὶ τὸ τίμιον ξύλον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τούτέστιν τὸν τύπον τοῦ σταυροῦ), ἐωρακὼς ὁ ἐνοικῶν δαίμων ἐν τῇ στήλῃ, μὴ φέρων ἰδεῖν τὸ φοβερὸν σημεῖον, ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ μαρμάρου μετὰ ἀταξίας πολλῆς, ἔρριψεν αὐτὴν τὴν στήλην καὶ συνέκλασεν αὐτὴν εἰς πολλὰ κλάσματα. For the temple of Isis at Philae, converted into a church of St Stephen in 537, see E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae* II (1969), nos 200–4 (esp. 201: ὁ σταυρὸς ἐνίκησεν, ἀεὶ νικᾷ). *CTh* XVI.10.25 (A.D. 435).

[143] *Myst.* III.30.175.

[144] ibid. III.17.141–2.

[145] ibid. III.28–9.

[146] *Myst.* V.23, where the ὕλη apt to receive divinity is surely our own body; besides, this is only a way of speaking (μὴ δή τις θαυμαζέτω ἐὰν ... λέγωμεν: *Myst.* V.23.232). On the eternity of matter, *Myst.* VIII.3 and *On the Chaldaean Oracles ap.* John Lydus *Mens.* IV.159.

[147] On Syrianus' influence on Proclus, see Anne Sheppard, 'Proclus' attitude to theurgy', *CQ* 32 (1982), 214–15, and J. Dillon in his introduction to Proclus' commentary *On the Parmenides* (1987), pp. xiii, xv. For Iamblichus and Syrianus, ibid. p. xxxi.

[148] *In Ti.* I.19.9; 77.24; 147.25; 152.28; 156.31; 159.27; 165.23; 209.1; 307.15; III.33.1; 34.5; 334.3 etc.

[149] Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 9: ταῦτα γὰρ ἔστιν ἐπάξια τῆς τοῦ Πλάτωνος διανοίας, ἀλλ'οὐχ ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη τῆς λέξεως. Cf. Proclus, *In Ti.* III. 29ff. and J. Dillon, *JHS* 108 (1988), 244 for the attribution.

[150] In *In Ti.* frs 34 and 71 Iamblichus disapproves of unnecessary distinctions; in frs 58 and 61 he opts for the simplest explanation.

[151] cf. Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 6; ibid. 82a, where Iamblichus is accused by Proclus of not being a careful reader of Plato.

only when he can indulge in an orgy of scholastic analysis.[152] Inevitably then, the way in which Proclus describes the theurgic ascent of the soul sets emphasis on knowledge rather than virtue and on the fragmentation of the cosmos rather than its unity.[153] More specifically, instead of the one δόσις claimed by Iamblichus, Proclus admits a hierarchization of the prophetic spirit, which becomes weaker as it is dispensed by lower powers in the pyramid of being.[154] Ironically, the theory of divination put forward by the influential head of the Athenian School has a lot in common with those ideas of Porphyry which are challenged in the *De Mysteriis*. Likewise, Proclus' conception of the function of the theurgist is in tune with the tradition which stems from Porphyry and is rejected by Iamblichus. For though occasionally Proclus denounces the technicians of prophecy, one cannot escape the impression that to his mind theurgical divination is primarily dependent on complicated ritual acts.[155]

What is remarkable from our point of view, however, is not the disagreement of Proclus and his successors with Iamblichus on the topic of divination, but their firm conviction that their theory and practice of theurgy stemmed directly from his. By the sixth century this belief was put forward unambiguously in a statement which has become classic:

> There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer hieratic practice, like Iamblichus and Syrianus and Proclus and the adepts of the hieratic School in general.[156]

Yet the pattern that emerges from these men's writings is different. Whereas for Plotinus and Iamblichus, the highest qualities in the spiritual and the moral spheres respectively are intuition and virtue, and their teaching manner is rather careless, concentrating as it does on the essential, often to the detriment of clarity and detail, Porphyry and Proclus keep good company with the rest of the philosophers mentioned by Damascius as thinkers attached to the letter either of the Platonic texts under discussion or of cult.[157] In short, if Iamblichus spoke ἐνθεαστικῶς,[158] Proclus had a scholastic mind which clung to the letter of both sanctity and metaphysics, with the result that he can be said to have played Porphyry to Iamblichus' Plotinus.[159]

With friends like this, who needs enemies? If the same people who extolled Iamblichus to the rank of the gods distorted his teaching on divination to the point of rendering it unrecognizable, what of the Christian 'enemy'? Following the mainstream of inside pagan opinion, many Christians presented Iamblichus as the arch-magician, the person mainly responsible for belief in obtaining oracles through the animation of statues, John Philoponus being a typical representative of this trend.[160] Yet, paradoxically, this was by no means the majority view among Christians, and the testimony of Synesius of Cyrene is worth recalling in this connection.

[152] A juxtaposition of the methods applied by the two men is to be found in Proclus, *In Ti.* III. 14, 16ff.; cf. Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 63; see also below, n. 159.

[153] cf. *Theol. Plat.* IV.9; also the valuable remarks of L. G. Westerink in the introduction to his edition of Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Phaedo* (1976), 19.

[154] *In Ti.* I. 158. 12ff.

[155] ibid. I. 51. 24ff.; III. 6. 12ff.; 155. 18ff.

[156] Damascius, *In Phaed.* I.172 (Westerink); cf. John Lydus, *Mens.* IV.53.

[157] For Iamblichus agreeing with Plotinus, Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* IV.5; *In Ti.* I. 307. 15ff. Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus was sometimes felt to be a pure Platonist: Damascius, *In Phil.* 10, p. 7 (Westerink). The essential relation between Plotinus and Iamblichus is one of vision and methodology, as observed by L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* I (1976), 15: 'Iamblichus' purpose is to make Plotinus' belief of the superiority of intuition to reason the guiding principle of a new systematic approach to Plato. Intuition, which is a superior form of sight, does not proceed from point to point, but has a unified vision of the structure of all reality.' See also nn. 45–9, 55.

[158] Iamblichus' manner is ἐποπτικώτερον (intuitive), as opposed to Porphyry's which is μερικώτερον (analytical): Proclus, *In Ti.* I. 204. 26–7; he writes ἐνθεαστικῶς (in an inspired manner): op. cit. I. 156. 31; cf. Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* p. 57.1ff. N).

[159] For Proclus' daily programme, Marinus, *Procl.* 22. A good example of Proclus' incapacity to grasp Iamblichus' simplicity of thought is provided by his interpretation of *Ti.* 28c (*In Ti.* I. 307–9), where he is obliged to convict Iamblichus of inconsistency, cf. J. M. Dillon, *Iambl. Chalc. in Plat. dial. comm. fragm.* (1973), Appendix C, 417–19.

[160] According to John Philoponus, in his lost treatise περὶ ἀγαλμάτων Iamblichus attempted to prove the intrinsic sanctity of statues: ἔστι μὲν ὁ σκοπὸς Ἰαμβλίχῳ θεῖά τε δεῖξαι τὰ εἴδωλα, Photius, *Bibl.* cod. 215, 173b. Dodds, who takes the statement of Photius-Philoponus at face value, is nevertheless slightly uneasy about it (art. cit. (n. 8), 64, n. 94). Even Julian seems to have understood what Iamblichus was saying on the divinity of statues and to have followed his teaching on this issue: *Ep.* 89b, 293ab.

In a work of rare historical, if not literary, value the idiosyncratic bishop undertook to present divination by dreams as the only form of prophecy leading to God.[161] Claimed by its author as the product of automatic writing, which occurred towards the end of a night of inspiration in 405,[162] the *De Insomniis* — an otherwise flippant text — makes an important distinction: on one side stands dream divination which, though disdained by experts,[163] is the only universal road to the foreknowledge of the future, and on the other hand are to be found the rest of contemporary oracular methods — all manner of private divination classified as θύραθεν μαντική.[164] As we have seen, divination by dreams was an extremely popular practice,[165] and the interest of Synesius' text resides in the fact that it provides an apology for it, which was clearly influenced by Iamblichus' outlook:[166] even though he espoused the conventional Neoplatonic view of the cosmos which laid emphasis on its hierarchical nature rather than its unity,[167] Synesius still presented prophetic dreams as the fruits of holiness, and dismissed magical divination on the grounds that it uses violence towards the universe.[168]

The great majority of Christians, however, did not pay any attention to Iamblichus. His name, unlike that of Porphyry, is hardly ever mentioned by Christian polemicists. Yet neither Eusebius nor Theodoret, who does not allude to Iamblichus even once, can have been ignorant of his writings.[169] At the root of this treatment (which arises from negligence rather than deliberate scorn) lie three circumstances: firstly Iamblichus' style is not particularly relaxing; secondly his views on fate and prophecy are not at such variance with standard Christian belief; but most importantly he never writes in a defensive or aggressive spirit, apt to arouse the Fathers' eristic vein. This must indeed be the main reason why, despite his cult among pagan intellectuals, Iamblichus does not constitute an obvious Christian target. After all, as a qualification to the second point, one must remember that, if on matters of divination the two parties reached similar conclusions, they started their journey at diametrically opposite ends. The Christians rejected belief in fate solely on moral grounds; for they felt that, by contradicting divine omnipotence and abolishing man's freedom of conscience, belief in fate offended both the Creator and the created and rendered virtue superfluous.[170] For Iamblichus on the other hand, fate had no place in the universe for purely ontological reasons: he conceived of the cosmos as a unity, where everything was produced by progression rather than craftsmanship, as is the case in the Judaeo-Christian cosmology. To his mind man and God were for ever united, and any elements that could blur this unity — whether one chose to call them fate or passion — were a passing intervention with no real power over Being.[171]

Iamblichus' natural environment is, of course, the mystical dimension of Islam, as it developed from discussion in Sufi circles. That the teacher of Apamea was actually known in these milieux is established,[172] though how and to what extent he was exploited by them is a subject awaiting research. Yet their belief in the essential unity of the cosmos and in inspired revelation, and their constant effort towards achieving reunion with God are eminently Iamblichan themes, often expounded or pursued through methods which could well be described as 'theurgical'.

[161] *Insomn.* XI.143b: μαντικῆς ὁδοιπορούσης ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα. It is in this work that Synesius offers abundant information about private oracular consultation as an expensive, but widely practised pastime which was persecuted by the state, XII.144a.

[162] *Ep.* 154 ad fin.

[163] *Insomn.* V.135c: ὀνείρων δὲ ὑπερορῶσιν ὡς προύπτου πράγματος, οὗ μέτεστιν ὁμοτίμως ἁμαθεῖ τε καὶ σοφῷ.

[164] *Insomn.* XII.144b.

[165] See above, pp. 123–6. Synesius knew people who were collecting books on oniromancy, *Insomn.* XVII.151b.

[166] *Insomn.* XIV–XV.148–149a. One should not forget that the Aristotelian view, which did not recognize a divine origin to dreams, enjoyed a wide following, *PG* 149, 557.

[167] *Insomn.* II.131d–133a.

[168] *Insomn.* XII.145b: ὠθισμῷ καὶ μοχλείᾳ κινεῖν.

[169] cf. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 168.

[170] See, among others, Basil of Caesarea, *Hex.* VI.7 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Fat.*, *PG* 45, 145–73.

[171] *Myst.* VIII.8.272; cf. *In Alc.* fr. 5 (= Proclus, *In Alc.* 88, 10ff.).

[172] M. Steinschneider, *Die arabischen Uebersetzungen aus dem griechischen* (1960), 144; P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Hayyan* II (1942), 123ff. (Iamblichus on ritual); R. Walzer, 'Al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy and divination', *JHS* 77 (1957), 147–8 [= *Greek into Arabic* (1962), 218–19] (for Iamblichan influence); F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (trans. E. and J. Marmorstein) (1975), 42 (on Pythagorean commentaries); for an unpublished Arabic commentary on the *Golden Verses*, attributed in the title to Iamblichus and dated 677/1278–9, see N. Linley (ed. trans.), *Ibn al-Tayyib, Proclus' Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses*, Arethusa Monographs 10 (n.d.), v.

XIII

The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy

1. TYPOLOGY AND ORIGIN

The Chaldaean Oracles are a divine revelation in Greek hexameter verse of a cosmological and soteriological system and of a set of moral and ritual rules and instructions.[1] In this, as in many other respects, the poem is not unlike the Koran. A persistent tradition, first detectable in Iamblichus, echoed by the emperor Julian and repeated by Proclus, attributes its authorship to a certain Julian the Theurgist; this claim is corroborated by the tenth-century Suda Lexicon, where, in two separate entries, Julian the Theurgist is described as the author of oracles in hexameters who lived at the time of Marcus Aurelius, and Julian the Chaldaean as his father and a philosopher.[2] Additional information on the two Julians is provided by the eleventh-century polymath Michael Psellus, who displayed what might be thought too lively an interest in the

The following abbreviations have been used throughout this chapter:

CP A, B, C, D, E	Proclus' *Chaldaean Philosophy* in *Oracula chaldaica*, ed. and trans. E. des Places (Paris, 1971), 206–12.
Lewy	H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, ed. M. Tardieu, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1978).
Marinus *VP*	Marinus, *Vita di Proclo*, ed. and trans. P. Masullo (Naples, 1985).
Parm.	Damascius, *In Parmenidem*, ed. C. A. Ruelle (Paris, 1889).
PH	Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, ed. and trans. P. Athanassiadi, (Athens, 1999).
PP	Damascius, *De primis principiis*, I–III, ed. L. G. Westerink, trans. J. Combès (Paris, 1986–91).
PT	Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, I–VI, ed. and trans. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink (Paris 1968–97).

[1] Proclus, *In Tim.* I, 408, 12, characterizes them as θεοπαράδοτος θεολογία. The passages in Neoplatonic literature which refer to the λόγια as direct divine revelation have been collected by W. Theiler, *Die chaldäischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesios* (Halle, 1942), 2.

[2] Suda II, 642, 1, s.v. Ἰουλιανός 434: λόγια δι' ἐπῶν (λόγια being the technical Neoplatonic term for the Chaldaean Oracles), II, 641, 32, s.v. Ἰουλιανός 433.

Oracles for a Christian dignitary: the father Julian, reports Psellus, obtained for his son an archangelic soul, which he then put into contact with that of Plato.[3] All this is well known, yet the reason for restating these oft-quoted pieces of evidence is that the veracity of the sources has recently been questioned in connection with the authorship, and consequently the date, of the Chaldaean Oracles.[4] Since I see no virtue in doubt for doubt's sake, and since a strong and continuous Neoplatonic tradition advocates the attribution of the oracular verses to Julian the Theurgist, I have chosen to accept the evidence on which late antique spiritual orthodoxy was built,[5] and in what follows I shall attempt to explore the circumstances of the birth and codification of the Chaldaean Oracles by looking at the information available against a broader chronological and geographical background.

A first concern is Psellus' source. By his own confession, Psellus had read Proclus and found him at the pinnacle of all science and wisdom,[6] and a study of the method followed by him as he compiled his own Collection of the Chaldaean Oracles suggests that he had before his eyes the whole of Proclus' now lost Commentary on the Oracles. Extracting from the Proclean text those oracular lines which particularly appealed to him, Psellus appended to them first Proclus' own commentary and then a commentary on a commentary—his own highly interesting exegesis.[7] He also used Proclus' Commentary as the basis for several

[3] Psellus, *Περὶ τῆς χρυσῆς ἁλύσεως τῆς παρ' Ὁμήρῳ*, *REG* 1875, 217 and cf. Lewy, 224.

[4] The recent bibliography, inconclusively contesting the veracity of the sources, is assembled and discussed by S. Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira* (Atlanta, 1990), 2–3; cp. D. Porter, *JRS* 81 (1991), 225–6, claiming a 3rd-cent. date for the Oracles.

[5] Cp. Julian (*ep.* 12) and Proclus, *In Tim.* III, 63, 24: *ὁ Θεουργός* (. . .) *ᾧ μὴ θέμις ἀπιστεῖν*, where the word *θεουργός* should be understood as a personal name referring to Julian the Theurgist.

[6] Cp. *Chronogr.* 6. 38: *προβαίνων εἰς τὸν θαυμασιώτατον Πρόκλον ὡς ἐπὶ λιμένα μέγιστον κατασχών, πᾶσαν ἐκεῖθεν ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ νοήσεων ἀκρίβειαν ἔσπασα.*

[7] Psellus has transmitted forty fragments, which cover the entire thematic spectrum of the Oracles though the emphasis is definitely on ritual and eschatology (most recent edition by D. O'Meara, *Philosophica Minora* II (Leipzig, 1989), *opusc.* 38). It has been convincingly argued that he depends entirely on Proclus, cf. E. des Places, *Les Oracles Chaldaïques* (Paris, 1971), pp. 154, and esp. 203 with refs. L. G. Westerink's thesis, according to which Psellus had at his disposal only Proclus' refutation by Procopius of Gaza ('Proclus, Procopius, Psellus', *Mnemosyne* 10 (1940), 275–80) has been further undermined by the attribution to the Chaldaean Oracles of a doubtful Heraclitean hexameter deriving from Arethas (M. L. West, 'A Pseudo-Fragment of Heraclitus', *CR* NS 18 (1968), 257–8), which provides evidence for the availability of the Proclean Commentary beyond the Byzantine 'dark age'. Besides, a careful reading of Psellus' own Commentary suggests that he had read Proclus with a sympathetic eye, in the original rather than in the refutation of

summaries on the theology of the Oracles, and for the compilation of an anthology.[8] No other text on the Chaldaean Oracles seems to have been available to Psellus, so that one may safely assume that both the archangelic texture of the Theurgist's soul and its interviews with Plato belong to a Neoplatonic tradition which reached Psellus through Proclus.[9]

If we view this information in the light of what we know about the tradition of inspired theological poetry in the Near East, we are provided with several clues which may help us towards a reconstruction of the circumstances attending the emergence of the Chaldaean Oracles. After years of spiritual training, an individual born with the gift of prophecy may become 'transparent to God' and, falling into a state of trance, utter verse in the language of the cultural tradition to which he or she belongs. The 'revelation' that will thus ensue may comprise one or many lines, and is bound to recur in a matter of hours, days, months or years, so long as the 'vehicle of the divine' continues to be committed to other-worldly concerns. Once the link with the supernatural becomes established, those around 'the prophet' begin to anticipate the utterances and are ready to take them down. Such was the practice in Babylonian temples, as now emerges from the publication of their archives;[10] it was also the case with Muhammad,[11] and, nearer to home, with Ismail Emre (1900–70), an illiterate Turkish welder from Adana, to whom we owe more than two thousand songs of a distinctly theological content.[12]

Procopius, and made his own philological and theological comments with a view to the Christian audience that he was addressing. It must also be pointed out that despite his criticisms, a conscious effort towards a reconciliation of the Christian with the 'Chaldaean' theology alongside an uncommon involvement with the eschatology and the magical aspect of the Oracles are to be detected throughout.

[8] The five extracts from Proclus' *Chaldaean Philosophy* have been edited and translated by des Places (pp. 206–12); the three abstracts on Chaldaean theology are to be found in O'Meara's edition of Psellus, *opsc.* 39, 40, 41.

[9] Proclus himself was informed by means of a dream that he belonged to the 'Hermetic chain' and that he had the soul of Nichomachus of Gerasa: Marinus *VP* 28.

[10] 'Enthusiastic divination' (as opposed to 'rational' or 'technical' divination) was traditional in Mesopotamia: cp. J.-M. Durand, 'Les Textes prophétiques', *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1/1 (1988), 375–452. For the continuing awareness of the nature and role of individuals possessed by the god, cf. Proclus, *In Remp.* II, 246, 24: *οἱ τῶν θεῶν ἱεροὶ καὶ οἱ κλήτορες καὶ οἱ δοχεῖς*, where *δοχεύς* is distinguished from the other categories.

[11] For Muhammad, about the conditions of whose revelation we have detailed information, see the penetrating study of M. Rodinson, *Mahomet* (Paris, 1961), 95–124.

[12] On Ismail Emre, see my Introduction to the translation into Greek of a collection of his poetry in *Ἰσμαὴλ Ἐμρέ, Ἱνοές* (Athens, 1991), 9–43; cf. A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), 337, describing as an eyewitness the circumstances attending his trance during the 'birth' of a mystical song.

If we rethink what Psellus says about the two Julians in the light of this continuous tradition, we may formulate the following hypothesis: in the time of Marcus Aurelius there lived somewhere in the eastern part of the Roman empire a father and a son who belonged to a sacred caste. The latter used in a state of possession to utter hexameters on metaphysical, moral and scientific issues which his father, and possibly other members of the priestly caste to which the two men belonged, wrote down as they emerged.[13] The revelations must have occurred over a period of years, possibly decades, and as they were taken down by several hands they would have given rise from the very beginning to slightly differing versions which needed editing, doubtless with the help of the Theurgist himself. Whether the codification of the revealed wisdom was the work of Julian himself alone or the result of the intervention of several 'keepers of the holy word' we cannot know.[14] What seems certain however is that by the late third century, if not before, the Chaldaean Oracles had reached their canonical status, and were recognized as a sacred text at least within the boundaries of a charmed religious circle with international connections.[15]

The very first people known to us who sought to understand, explain,

[13] The co-operation of the father and the son in this connection formed part of Neoplatonic orthodoxy: cp. Proclus, *In Crat.* 72, 10–11 for the expression *τοῖς ἐπὶ Μάρκου γενομένοις θεουργοῖς*.

[14] That the Oracles did not form a continuous poem, but were a collection of revelations given on different occasions, was already perceived by Lewy (36). Following Geffcken, P. Hadot advances the view that the Chaldaean Oracles 'comme les écrits hermétiques, les *Oracles Sybillins* et les textes magiques, ont été un livre de révélation toujours en devenir, auquel de nouveaux textes sont venus sans cesse s'ajouter' (Lewy, 706). I would suggest instead that the codification of the text occurred early in its development, possibly even under the Julians themselves, and this is why so much exegesis was needed, as in the parallel case of the Koran. What I describe here was definitely the case of Ismail Emre who, after recovering from his trance, used to have read to him the sometimes conflicting versions that had been taken down by the different people present, and pronounce on the correct word or phrase.

[15] The Chaldaean Oracles have been aptly called 'The Bible of the Neoplatonists'; for this now standard expression, which was probably first used by Cumont, see M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, ii, 2nd edn. (1961), 479. The first testified commentator on the Oracles is Porphyry, cf. Marinus *VP* 26, 622–3: *τοῖς Πορφυρίου καὶ Ἰαμβλίχου μυρίοις ὅσοις εἰς τὰ λόγια καὶ τὰ σύστοιχα τῶν Χαλδαίων συγγράμματα*, a claim confirmed by John Lydus *Mens.* IV, 53, and by the Suda IV, 178, 22, *s.v. Πορφύριος* 2098. D. Potter, *JRS* 81 (1991), 225–6, sees a Manichaean influence on the Oracles and accordingly proposes a third century date for their composition. 'Manichaean' vocabulary was part of the theological *koine* of the period and, though I find it possible that in their definitive form the Oracles belong to the third century, I would place their 'emergence' in the second century, while pointing out that their status as a canonical text was not recognized before Iamblichus penned his massive commentary on them (cf. Julian, *ep.* 12 and Damascius, *PP* II, 1 for the length).

and propagate this occult wisdom were Porphyry, Amelius, and finally Iamblichus,[16] who established the Chaldaean Oracles as the holy book of paganism. The extant fragments point to a global revelation, and, given both their character and mode of transmission, it is only natural that the Oracles should always have appeared to the analytical scholarly mind as inconsequential or even illogical. Indeed it is an indication of how obscure and incoherent this automatic poetry must have sounded even in its complete form that from Iamblichus to Damascius a commentary on the Oracles in oral or written guise was considered the crowning achievement of an exegetical career. Equally, for a student to be admitted to a course on the Chaldaean Oracles amounted to an acknowledgement that he was part of the golden chain and on a potential short-list for the Platonic Succession.[17]

The Apamean Connection

A much-discussed issue is the connection of the philosophical system expounded in the Oracles with that of Numenius of Apamea. As formulated by Dodds, in cautious but perceptive terms, 'some sort of bridge must have linked the two systems; but I find it hard to be quite sure which way the traffic ran. It could even have been a two-way traffic, since (. . .) Numenius and Julianus may well have been contemporaries'.[18] Leaving aside for the moment this unprovable proposition, we may begin to explore the hypothesis of a connection between the Chaldaean Oracles and Apamea by looking closely at the town's religious and philosophical tradition.

Both recent archaeological surveys and late antique literary sources suggest that the as yet unexcavated oracular temple of Bel dominated the market place of Apamea, conveying by its sheer size and splendour the omnipotence of the cosmic god who dwelt in it, something that it is not difficult for us to visualize if we think of the Bel complex of another Syrian city—Palmyra. 'Bel', meaning 'Lord', is an epithet of the Babylonian storm god Adad,[19] whom Proclus identifies with the Twice-

[16] A random reference in Plotinus (1. 9) on the subject of suicide does not constitute evidence that Plotinus knew the Oracles, and may even be due to the editorial intervention of Porphyry. For the view that Plotinus was vaguely aware of the existence of the Oracles but made no conscious use of them, J. Dillon, 'Plotinus and the Chaldaean Oracles', in S. Gersch and Ch. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1992), 131–40.

[17] Marinus, *VP* 26 for Proclus and Domninus, Damascius, *PH* 145B for Hegias, and *JHS* 113 (1993), 4–5 for the Platonic chain.

[18] 'New Light on the "Chaldaean Oracles"', *HThR* 54 (1961), 271.

[19] Adad is the East Semitic or Babylonian form of the name of the storm god (as distinct

Beyond, the creative principle of the Chaldaean Oracles and a central divinity of the system in both theological and philosophical terms.[20]

As regards the Chaldaean roots of Bel recent research has made a strong case not only for the early spread of Babylonian religious culture to Syria, but also for its continuing influence throughout antiquity,[21] indeed an influence that was reinvigorated in Hellenistic times, when 'Chaldaean' as a technical term travelled westwards acquiring wide notoriety.[22] Leaving aside the wandering diviners identified in legal and everyday language as Chaldaeans, we should focus on the huge monuments to Bel in the contiguous territories of Palmyra and Apamea and advance the reasonable hypothesis that they perpetuated a venerable tradition firmly rooted in pre-Seleucid Babylon. It is within this context that the inscription KLDY from Roman Palmyra should be read as 'Chaldaeans', as was originally suggested, and be assumed to refer to a local priestly caste involved with the cult of Bel.[23]

Whatever the title of the Apamean priests of Bel (though the inscriptional evidence from Palmyra encourages one to think that 'Chaldaean' would be a plausible name), their involvement with the intellectual life of a town which had produced Posidonius is epigraphically attested. A second-century AD inscription, on a reused column of the great colonnade, identifies a priest of Bel as the head of the local Epicurean

from its West Semitic or Phoenician cognate 'Hadad'). Qualified as 'Bel', that is 'Lord' (and again distinguished on the same grounds from his western counterpart whose epithet was Beel/Baal), Adad had a great centre of worship in Aleppo among other places, as testify the festivals of the god held there in the second millennium BC: H. Klengel, *Geschichte Syriens im 2. Jahrtausend v.u.Z., II Mitte- und Südsyria* (Berlin, 1969), 64 (Tablet V Bo T 89). Stephanie Dalley points out that 'the epithet Bel could be applied to various national gods or patron deities of major cities, but only to deities whose ancestry was Mesopotamian': 'Bel at Palmyra and Elsewhere in the Parthian Period', *ARAM* 7 (1995) [1998], 145 and by way of further clarification mentions 'Bel' as the epithet of the moon god Sin at Harran from at least as early as the Assyrian Empire.

[20] The gods of the Oracles speak in Syriac identifying the One with Ad and the intelligible creator of the world with Adad: Proclus, *In Parm.* VII (Klibansky–Labowsky), pp. 58, 30 ff.

[21] See Klengel, (n. 19) *passim*; for Niya (the predecessor of Apamea) as an important centre *c.*1500–1200 BC, ibid. 58–74. For the location of Niya, M. C. Astour, 'The Partition of the Confederacy of Mukis-Nuhasse-Nii by Suppiluliuma', *Orientalia*, 38 (1969), 386–7.

[22] See Diodorus 2. 29–31, Strabo 16. 1. 6. In 139 BC the *praetor peregrinus* banished the 'Chaldaeans' from Rome and Italy: 'edicto Chaldaeos citra decimum diem abire ex Urbe atque Italia iussit, levibus et ineptis ingeniis fallaci siderum interpretatione quaestuosam mendaciis suis caliginem inicientes' (Valerius Maximus 1. 3. 2).

[23] For the view that KLDY represents the local tribe 'Claudias', as suggested by T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux* (Paris, 1972), 259–61, see Y. Hajjar, 'Divinités oraculaires et rites divinatoires en Syrie et en Phénicie à l'époque gréco-romaine', *ANRW* II 18, 4 (1990), 2255. On the probable ethnic connotations of the adjective 'Chaldaean', Lewy (425).

School.[24] And while the exact nature of Numenius' connection with the temple remains unclear, one can see how philosophy and religion, tradition and innovation mingled with and fertilized each other in the sanctuary of Bel. Integrated then in the intellectual life of Apamea and at the same time respecting its immemorial cultic tradition, a caste of hereditary priests may have continued the Palaeo-Babylonian tradition of enthusiastic divination,[25] through which the oracles of the Apamean Bel enjoyed such high credence in the Roman empire,[26] until one priest by the name of Julian seems to have produced a revelation in the theological idiom of the region and of the times and yet firmly rooted in the millennial Babylonian tradition. The heritage of Posidonius and especially that of Numenius are discernible in the theology of the fragments that we possess, so that the hypothesis that the two Julians may have moved in Numenius' circle in Apamea, at a time when religious consciousness was shifting from pantheism to transcendentalism, appears highly attractive.[27]

The crucial piece of evidence linking the Apamean Bel with the Chaldaean Oracles may be lurking behind the lines of a Greek inscription on an altar dedicated to the god by a certain Sextus in far away Vaison-la-Romaine (Vasio): 'To the ruler of fortune Belus, Sextus dedicated an altar in remembrance of the Apamean oracles' (*τῶν ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ μνησάμενος λογίων*).[28] Whether the dedicator of the inscription is Sextus Varius Marcellus of Apamea, the father of Elagabal, or some obscure soldier,[29] it is extremely likely that the phrase 'the *λόγια* at Apamea' refers to a collection of oracles which was to become universally known as 'the Chaldaean Oracles'.[30]

[24] J.-P. Rey-Coquais, 'Inscriptions grecques d'Apamée', *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*, 23 (1973), 66–8. For the date, cp. pl. v 2, p. 84.

[25] In this connection cf. Iamblichus' programmatic statement, *Myst.* 1, 2. Lewy (427–8) understood the duality of the term 'Chaldaean' in this context as referring both to the homeland of the Babylonian theologians and to their membership of a priestly caste.

[26] According to Cassius Dio (78. 8. 5–6) Septimius Severus consulted the oracle on his imperial fortunes (twice, in 180 and 201/2), and so did Macrinus in 218 (78. 40. 3).

[27] The Stoic concept of *πῦρ νεοροόν* is ubiquitous in the Oracles. For an assessment of Posidonius' role in shaping Syrian solar theology, see the classic treatment in K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie: neue Untersuchungen über Posidonios* (Munich, 1926), 308–85. Two characteristic examples are Posidonius fr. 101 (Edelstein–Kidd) for a definition of the first principle, and Numenius fr. 2 for the way of grasping it.

[28] IG XIV 2482.

[29] For a discussion on the identity of Sextus, see J. Balty, 'L'oracle d'Apamée' *Ant. Class.* 50 (1981), 9. Rey-Coquais nevertheless seems to favour the identification with Sextus Varius Marcellus ('Inscriptions grecques d'Apamée', 68).

[30] It is worth pointing out that the term 'Chaldaean' is not to be found anywhere in the surviving fragments, making it appear as the definition of an outsider, presumably a commentator.

It is against this background that the settling in Apamea in the latter part of the third century of two leading Platonists turns into a quasi-certainty the assumption that the sacred verses were preserved in that part of the world, indeed in the archives of the temple of Bel. Disappointed for whatever reason with the circle of Plotinus, the westerner Amelius chose Apamea as his permanent home around 270 and, whether or not he was attracted there by a possible archive of 'Chaldaean Oracles', he seems to have espoused their theology and interpreted Plato along its lines.[31] Likewise, after years of travelling, the Syrian Iamblichus based himself in Apamea as an exegete of the mysteries of the Beyond, gathering around him students from all over the Mediterranean world;[32] and it was precisely through the action of this 'chorus of philosophers'[33] that by the fourth century both the canonical text and Iamblichus' voluminous commentary on it had travelled westwards, revitalizing philosophy in the Roman empire, creating new intellectual centres, and endowing old ones with a lease of originality.

Meanwhile in Apamea the increasing sanctity of its temple was seen by the Christian establishment as a major scandal which called for an appropriate treatment. The detailed account by Theodoret of the destruction of the temple—admittedly composed half a century after the event—suggests that an edict specifically aimed at the Apamean temple, regarded as a particularly important pagan symbol, was promulgated in the 380s. Leading a force of two thousand men, the Praetorian Prefect of the East Cynegius, an ardent Christian, arrived at Apamea and set his forces to work against the temple, but in vain. The gigantic edifice resisted; its eventual destruction by the combination of human cunning and divine intervention was brought about a little later thanks to Bishop Marcellus in the first act of violence by a bishop against a religious monument in the Roman empire.[34]

[31] The connection between the Oracles and Amelius is brought out by H. D. Saffrey, whose critical reading of Proclus, *In Tim.* 1, 361, 26–362, 2 makes Amelius' link with the theology of the Chaldaean Oracles a near certainty: Saffrey, 'Les Néoplatoniciens et les *Oracles Chaldaïques*', *REAug* 27 (1981), 224–5.

[32] For an attempted reconstruction of Iamblichus' travels, see Athanassiadi, 'The Oecumenism of Iamblichus: Latent Knowledge and its Awakening', *JRS* 85 (1995), 245–6.

[33] For the expression ὁ τῶν φιλοσόφων ἐξ Ἀπαμείας χορός referring to Iamblichus' pupils in connection with the Emperor Julian, see Libanius, *or.* 52. 21.

[34] For the circumstances of the destruction of the temple, see Theodoret, *HE* 5. 21. 5–14; cf. Libanius' shocked comment to Theodosius in an oration composed shortly after the event (*or.* 30, 43).

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The Present Collection

Any attempt at a description and analysis of the Chaldaean Oracles should begin with the fundamental question of their transmission. The fragments that we possess—some 350 lines divided into 190 fragments of uneven length—have entered the Collection primarily through two channels: Proclus and Damascius.[35] The Proclean fragments, which represent a little less than four-fifths of the whole, come either directly from his extant works—especially the short commentary on the *Cratylus* and the *Platonic Theology*—or through the intermediary of Michael Psellus. The Damascius fragments on the other hand, amounting to a little more than one fifth of the Collection, are direct quotations, the overwhelming majority of which derives from two works: *On the First Principles* and the Commentary *On the Parmenides*. Fourteen quotations by Proclus and Damascius overlap in part or *in toto*. As regards other authors, if we except John Lydus (who is represented in the Collection by nine short fragments, but whose exclusive source again seems to be Proclus), the contributions of Julian, Didymus, Synesius, Boethius, Hierocles, Hermeias, Simplicius, and Olympiodorus amount to a total of a few lines. It is clear therefore that any attempt towards building a Collection should rest on a meticulous study of the respective readings of the Chaldaean Oracles by Proclus and Damascius, two authors whose substantial disagreement in their understanding of the Platonic heritage[36] also pervades their differing approaches to the Oracles.

Yet dealing with the *membra disiecta* of the Oracles according to provenance was not the way that appeared to their first modern editor as the most obvious methodological course. The reason for this may be that W. Kroll was not interested in producing a straightforward edition, but in extricating from the fragments a philosophical and theosophical system for the purposes of a post-doctoral thesis, which was indeed defended on 19 April 1894 at the University of Breslau.[37] Accordingly he gleaned through later Greek literature, plucked the Chaldaean hexa-

[35] As suggested by Saffrey (*REAug* 210), a more methodical reading of the sources is necessary both in view of the discovery of new oracles and for the fuller understanding of the ones that we have already. One should add that several phrases and sentences which have been transmitted periphrastically in a non-poetic form should also be included in the collection, as e.g. the reference to the visions of the theurgists in Proclus, *In Remp.* II, 155, 5 ff., cp. in line 7 the phrase ὥς φασιν οἱ θεουργοί.

[36] Cp. *JRS* 85 (1995), 247–8 with refs.

[37] *De Oraculis chaldaicis*, submitted *ad veniam docendi* (Breslau, 1894).

meters wherever they cropped up and arranged them in an order which starts with the theoretical and descends to the practical.[38] The emphasis however is on theory, something for which Kroll was criticized—to my mind unjustifiably—by subsequent researchers, especially as he was well aware of the fact that the poem related to mysteries, and was therefore more relevant to religion than to philosophy.[39]

Seventy-five years later Kroll's systematic—and arbitrary—codification was unquestioningly adopted by des Places who, in the Budé edition of 1971, simply inserted a few new fragments identified as Chaldaean by Bidez and others.[40] Finally, Kroll's order of the Chaldaean Oracles became a sacrosanct fossil for the wider world, when in 1989 Ruth Majercik appended to des Places's text an English translation and commentary.[41]

A Return to the Sources

Given that the original order of the metaphysically transmitted utterances can never be recaptured, it is not merely legitimate, but may be most appropriate methodologically to reorganize the Collection according to the provenance of the fragments, while searching for clues and guidance to this obscure text in the reaction of its ancient readers rather than in the commentaries of Psellus, as has been the case so far. For indeed, from Hans Lewy, whose *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* was completed in 1945, to Joseph Combès, the most recent editor of Damascius, the tendency has been to take Psellus' summaries as a basis for the construction of Chaldaean theology and then try to fit the ancient authors round it. What ensues in most cases is utter confusion, since what seems not to have been realized so far is that what we have in the preserved commentaries of Proclus and Damascius is not complementary interpretations of a theological system, but two conflicting understandings of it, which cannot possibly be reconciled. For this

[38] Kroll's bipartition of the Chaldaean Oracles into a Platonic-philosophical and a magico-theurgical section has been a decisive influence on subsequent scholarship; Lewy further rigidified it, while recently it suggested to Saffrey (*REAug* 220) the following bold, if unprovable theory: 'Les Oracles Chaldaïques sont donc une collection composite réunissant d'une part de vieux oracles chaldaïques [assumed to be of a magical character], peut-être rassemblés par Julien-père, et de nouveaux oracles chaldaïques proférés par Julien-fils. Ces nouveaux oracles sont les oracles platoniciens.' Even the appellation 'Theurgist' of the younger Julian contradicts this theory.

[39] 'mysteria non e philosophia sed e religione oriuntur' *De Oraculis chaldaicis*, 68.

[40] For the new fragments, see M. Tardieu in Lewy 520–2, and H. D. Saffrey 'Nouveaux oracles chaldaïques dans les scholies du *Paris. gr.* 1853', *RPh* 43 (1969), 59–70.

[41] See R. Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 1989), together with D. Potter's review in *JRS* 81 (1991), 225–7.

reason I propose to forget Psellus and turn instead to Proclus and Damascius individually.

3. PROCLUS

Proclus was a born teacher, a compulsive writer, and a gifted commentator.[42] Confident in his unequivocal understanding of whatever text he read, he invariably knew how to explain those points which he felt to be in need of clarification in a lucid if prolix manner. As a reader of the Oracles Proclus concentrates on astronomy, metaphysics, ethics, ritual, and magic; in short on all the subjects touched on by the Chaldaean revelation. His interests are thus far wider than Damascius', even if we allow for the fact that the works of Damascius which have come down to us are primarily metaphysical. What is important, however, for our purposes is not so much the breadth of the themes covered by Proclus (though this is significant too), as the manner of approach and presentation of each one of them. As a preliminary remark one may comment on Proclus' strongly hieratic and hierarchical perception of cosmic space, which defines both his metaphysical and soteriological vision and his understanding of astronomy.

The basic Platonic antithesis between a paradigmatic and a created world becomes a trichotomy in the Chaldaean system:

> For it is in three that the Intellect of the Father said that all things should be divided
> And before he had even nodded his will everything was divided. (fr. 22)

These lines have been preserved both by Proclus and by Damascius. Commenting on them Proclus lays emphasis on the triadic nature of all things in all the worlds.[43] Conversely Damascius stresses the united character of the trinity—*τὸ ἀληθῶς ἡνωμένον*—and is further concerned to prove that God is one, despite the triadic hypostasis reflected in the adjective *τριγλώχις*.[44] One is left with the sense of an ineluctable

[42] As Marinus realized, the hallmark of Proclus' existence was 'full happiness' (*εὐδαιμονία*), the alternative title of the *Life of Proclus* being *Περὶ εὐδαιμονίας*. As the leitmotiv of the book, the theme of *εὐμοιρία* is discussed in *VP* 2 and 34; cf. also ibid. 33, 809 for the divine gift *par excellence* of *εὐμοιρία*, also bestowed by the gods on Isidore, *PH* fr. 33C. On Proclus' ease as a universal exegete and on his superhuman daily routine of ritual, lecturing, and writing tasks, *VP* 22, 549–55; after his seventieth year, when Proclus was struck by senility, he attempted to keep up his customary programme, though *πάντα (. . .) ἐπὶ τὸ ἀσθενέστερον πράττων*: *VP* 26, 642–4.

[43] *Parm.* 1091: *τὸ τριαδικὸν ἄνωθεν πρόεισι μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων*; for another comment on the same fragment by Proclus, *In Tim.* III, 243.

[44] *PP* III 58; cf. III, 136: *ὅτι τὰ πολλὰ τὸ ἀπειροδύναμόν ἐστι τοῦ ἑνός*—it is the potentiality rather than the reality of creation that interests Damascius.

ambiguity, intentionally created by Damascius, who does not seem to believe that things can be schematically represented if one wants to remain faithful to the fundamental intuition that the world of sensible experience is illusory through and through. While in theory agreeing with this proposition, Proclus is compelled to follow his strong analytical and didactic streak and to present metaphysics in terms of a neat spatiality which is extended to the function as well as the location of the first principles.[45]

Divided into the empyrian, the aetherial, and the material world, which correspond to the *νοῦς*, the soul, and the body in man,[46] the cosmos is seen by Proclus in its tripartite division as the realm of Ouranos, Cronos, and Zeus, whom he conceives respectively as the cohesive, the partitive, and the creative principle.[47] All three of these worlds are enveloped in metaphysical light, an often 'singing light' whose behaviour varies according to the place that it occupies in the universe.[48] Unlike the light of the sun, this is not a derivative of fire, but a transubstantial entity which proceeds from the Father and weaves all things together before entrusting them for all eternity to the binding principle of love.[49] Indeed if one were asked to define the monotheistic element in the Chaldaean system according to Proclus' understanding, one would certainly name light, as the most spiritual and at the same time most ungraspable and ubiquitous principle in that system.

Proclus' pedagogic sense however leads him to apply to his metaphysical analysis categories borrowed from the disciplines of physics and ethics; thus he describes 'this-worldly fire' as something *contra naturam* (*παρὰ φύσιν*).[50] This literal approach, which obviously constitutes a much more successful teaching device than does Damascius' poetic ambiguity, also allows Proclus to talk about time as a multi-tiered reality and the arena within which salvation is achieved, in a way that would have shocked Plato but which is in tune with theurgic practice.[51]

[45] See e.g. *In Tim.* II, 106; *PT* IV, 111. Cf. *CP* A, dominated by a didactic anthropomorphism. Another example illustrating this point is provided by the classificatory attempt of *PT* IV, 103–15.

[46] *In Tim.* II, 57–8 and fr. 5; cf. also *PT* IV, 111 and fr. 85 for the role of each teletarch in his respective sphere.

[47] *In Crat.* 63–4 and fr. 8 (though see *In Remp.* II, 220–1 for a contradiction).

[48] See *In Remp.* II, 201 and fr. 49, commenting on which (*In Tim.* III, 14) Proclus speaks of the duality of unifying light (*ἑνοποιὸν φῶς*) which involves at once eternal movement and absolute rest.

[49] *In Tim.* II, 9 and fr. 60; *In Tim.* II, 54 and fr. 39 together with *In Parm.* 769 and fr. 42.

[50] *In Tim.* III, 130, 7.

[51] *In Tim.* III, 43, an extremely important passage, which in connection with *In Tim.* III, 20 sets the theoretical bases for the theurgic ascent.

At the same time the astronomical and more generally mathematical dimension of the Oracles exerts too lively a fascination on Proclus to be put down to the mere accidents of transmission. In this connection he finds that Plato's 'level' understanding of astronomy cannot compare with the 'spherical' conception of the Oracles,[52] and, though he concedes that on certain points Plato held the same theories as the divinely inspired Chaldaeans (*In Tim.* III, 124), occasionally even uttering the odd Chaldaean Oracle, in spirit at least if not literally,[53] both in science and in metaphysics Plato's understanding remained all too human.[54]

The most important aspect of the Oracles for Proclus is the soteriological, which he understands and presents in the light of his own rigid asceticism and ritualism.[55] Indeed these two features, which on the evidence of Proclus alone have been assumed to be paramount in the Oracles, may well have played a less prominent role within the framework of the original teaching. Often the language of Proclean asceticism is far more strident than the oracle that it purports to explicate; thus, commenting on fr. 116, which says that divine matters are not for those who think in a 'bodily' way, Proclus declares that to live in a body is 'unnatural', whereas to be in Hades without a body is 'natural'.[56] 'The root of evil is the body just as that of good is the intellect', he intones elsewhere.[57] In tune with his moral radicalism, Proclus chose to remain a virgin,[58] regarding sexual abstinence as an asset towards salvation. Another prerequisite was cultic correctness.[59] Accordingly he set out to explain the hidden rules which govern universal sympathy, and to reveal the ways in which they can be put into practical use.[60] He himself used these paths often enough in his life to help others as well as himself, and

[52] *In Tim.* III, 60–61.

[53] *PT* V, 130.

[54] Note the critical remark (*In Remp.* II, 143; *καὶ οὐκέτι ταῦτα Πλάτωνος οὐδὲ Τιμαίου λόγοι τινός, ἀλλὰ θεουργῶν καὶ θεῶν ἄγνωστα γραφόντων*) on the superiority of the Chaldaean revelation over Plato as regards the magical sign X which marks the substance of the souls.

[55] On Proclus' excessive asceticism, *VP* 12 (Plutarch found the young man's diet so frugal that he feared for his life); ibid. 19. For his extreme ritualism, *inter alia*, *VP* 18, 19. *In Remp.* II, 99 describes a hierarchy of ascent and deliverance from the cycle of birth according to the soul's behaviour.

[56] *In Crat.* 87, 25–8.

[57] *CP* C (p. 108).

[58] *VP* 17, 412–15, 20, 512–13; Damascius *PH* fr. 56.

[59] Cp. *In Tim.* I, 212, 15 ff: so that God dispenses grace, the faithful must *ἀδιαλείπτως ἔχεσθαι τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον θρησκείας*.

[60] See *CP* A (pp. 206–7); *In Crat.* 31 (which advocates a magical view of salvation); *In Remp.* II, 154–5; *In Remp.* I, 110, 28; *In Crat.* 95 (on the importance of *βάρβαρα ὀνόματα/ συνθήματα*) etc.

had numerous encounters with the divine, whether on his own initiative or on that of the gods themselves.[61]

Several chapters of the *Life of Proclus* are dedicated to the miracles that he performed on behalf of individuals and the community, and the 'Chaldaean' basis of both his prophetic and magic art is explicitly stated by his biographer. Of particular significance in this connection is the rain miracle which delivered Attica from a drought.[62] Produced by the movement of an iynx, this thaumaturgy related to a θεουργικὴ ἀγωγή which had been used a hundred years earlier for similar purposes by the hierophant Nestorius. Nestorius transmitted it to his grandson, the diadochus Plutarch, who in turn handed it down to his daughter Asclepigeneia, Proclus' instructor in magical lore.[63] One is forcefully reminded of the original rain miracle of AD 172 performed in accordance with 'Chaldaean' methodology by Julian the Theurgist who thus saved the Roman army from thirst and assured its victory over the Quadi.[64]

Proclus' personal involvement with the divine—his interviews with specific gods, which he publicized in a now lost treatise, and his playing around with the cosmic powers—[65] inevitably tinged his overall vision. Yet, if his anthropomorphic way of conceiving and expressing divinity should be seen as the natural expression of his literal, untormented understanding in metaphysics and of his formalism in the sphere of

[61] Cp. Marinus, *VP* 7, 28, 31, 32. Simplicius (*CAG* IX, 795) reports that Proclus demonstrated that divided time was a god since he could be called to produce an epiphany (cp. Proclus *In Tim.* III, 20). When Athena's statue is removed from the Parthenon, the goddess informs Proclus that she would like to come and cohabit with him: *VP* 30, 736–42.

[62] *VP* 28, 686–8.

[63] For Nestorius' deliverance of Attica from the earthquake of 375, which destroyed much of Greece, see Zosimus 4. 18. 2–4; he performed it θεοειδέσιν ἐννοίαις παιδαγωγούμενος: ibid. 3 (cp. Proclus, *In Remp.* II, 64 and 324–5, for his theurgic proficiency). The miracle was celebrated by Syrianus in a hymn in honour of Achilles (Zosimus ibid. 4 and F. Paschoud n. *ad loc.* in Zosime, *Histoire Nouvelle* II/2 (1979), 368–9). For the line of transmission of the *Theurgic Conduct*, *VP* 28, 677–83. It is likely that Nestorius himself transmitted his occult wisdom to a daughter who then passed it on to Plutarch. That would be in tune with the well-known practice of transmitting certain aspects of magical lore only by a cross-sexual route. Alternatively Plutarch may have been Nestorius' son, as argued on the evidence of *PH* fr. 64.

[64] This standard piece of Neoplatonist hagiography, which tallies so well both with Nestorius' and Proclus' acts, has also been contested recently: for the relevant bibliography, Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, 3 n. 6. A combined miracle, reminiscent of that of AD 172 and anticipating that of Nestorius, was performed in Constantinople by the Emperor Julian (who in all probability had been initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries by Nestorius himself): Libanius, *or.* 15. 71.

[65] Cp. *VP* 28, 677–9: ταῖς γὰρ τῶν Χαλδαίων συστάσεσι καὶ ἐντυχίαις καὶ τοῖς θείοις καὶ ἀφθέγκτοις στροφάλοις ἐκέχρητο. 685–6: φάσμασι μὲν Ἑκατικοῖς φωτοειδέσιν αὐτοπτουμένοις ὡμίλησεν, ὡς καὶ αὐτός που μέμνηται ἐν ἰδίῳ συγγράμματι.

morals, in strictly pedagogic terms it provided those who strove to conceptualize the unseen with a tangible progressive approach.

Constant solicitude for salvation, sought as much through practical and magical as through intellectual means, presupposes an eschatological view of the world, which indeed Proclus finds in the Oracles (frs. 164, 165, 157–162) and on which he duly expands, sometimes lending it apocalyptic overtones (fr. 170). He never tires of repeating that in this harmonious cosmos, which is punctuated all along with mementoes of the divine presence, the only enemy of man is 'the turbulence of matter' (*In Tim.* III, 325) 'by which many are pulled down into twisted streams' (fr. 172). And though he concedes that 'we are images of the intellectual entities, and effigies of the unknown symbols',[66] he also insists on the element of forgetfulness of our true status, which makes us vulnerable to attack—that of the passions engaging their battle from within and of the demons from without. Yet this picture of the human adventure is only painted in such dark colours so that the message of salvation may stand out in relief; for in his struggle towards recollection and recognition of the signs which are to set him free from the servitude of matter, man is not alone. The Father has sown among us 'the race of theurgists who in their freedom from envy aspire to equal God's goodness instead of being drawn down to the conflicts and strifes of men'.[67] This hero of wisdom and love that is the theurgist represents for Proclus—as he also did for the Emperor Julian—the constant manifestation of the divine in the field of historical relativity, the element and guarantee of permanent, uninterrupted grace for all generations of men.

4. PROCLUS AND ĐAMASCIUS: DEBTS ANĐ LEGACIES

In approaching the Chaldaean Oracles Proclus and Damascius seem to have had widely diverging aims, the former being drawn by the systematic classification of an emanational structure and its practical adaptations for salvational and magical purposes, the latter choosing to comment on those passages which delineate a fundamentally negative theology. The particular concerns of Proclus and Damascius *vis-à-vis* the Oracles should however be envisaged in wider context, and an inquiry about both the debts and the legacies of the two men in this connection may prove particularly enlightening. Such an inquiry would reveal

[66] *CP* E (p. 211).

[67] *CP* C (pp. 208–9); what the theurgist has in common with Plato's God is the divine characteristic *par excellence*, that of τὸ ἄφθονον.

Damascius as a straightforward case: as in other matters, here too he followed in the footsteps of Iamblichus, while showing a fair degree of independence, and left no progeny whatever.[68] Unknown to Psellus and Pletho,[69] his treatment of the Oracles caused Kroll to raise an eyebrow,[70] while it seems to have perplexed des Places to the point that in his Introductory Notice to the Chaldaean Oracles he omitted him altogether from a list of readers of the Oracles which includes even authors who have not preserved a single line!

By contrast the approach of Proclus, whose now lost commentary on the Oracles was eagerly studied and on several occasions summarized by Psellus, appealed to contemporaries and posterity alike. In his fascination with the ritual and systematic aspects of the Oracles, Proclus too can be seen to depend on Iamblichus, though equally unilaterally; abetted by Psellus, these two concerns of the Athenian diadochus—the practical and the scholastic—have determined how the Chaldaean Oracles were perceived by scholars from Lewy to Dodds and Majercik, and have served as guidelines in our retrospective appreciation of Iamblichus. Thus a meticulously hierarchical theology and a ritualistic—almost mechanical—method of ascent towards the First Principles have become synonymous with the Chaldaean Oracles and, by extension, with their original exegete, Iamblichus. Yet this simplistic vision of the Oracles, for which Psellus even more than Proclus is responsible, vanishes if one is prepared to consider the Damascian view.

5. THE ALTERNATIVE CHALDAEAN ORACLES

Damascius' Peculiar Way

Like his predecessors, Damascius intended to devote an independent commentary to the Chaldaean Oracles,[71] a project which may have never

[68] Combès (*PP* II, 215 n. 3) advances the plausible hypothesis that many elements of Iamblichus' *Chaldaean Theology* were integrated by Damascius in his treatise *On the First Principles*. Indeed he describes the entire first volume as 'une justification critique de la doctrine selon laquelle l'inéffable est transcendant à l'un et l'un transcendant à la triade qui suit', which on his evidence was Iamblichus' interpretation, not accepted by Proclus, and not apparent from the *De Mysteriis*. As regards Damascius' posterity, even his own pupil and companion Simplicius admits that he finds him too difficult, indeed incomprehensible (*CAG* IX, 625, 2 and 775, 32).

[69] See the new edition of Pletho's *Chaldaean Oracles* by B. Tambrun-Krasker (Athens, 1995).

[70] G. Kroll (*De oraculis chaldaicis*, p. 10 n. 2) complains of Damascius' lack of originality in rather strong terms when he refers to his *ingenii sterilitas*. He is even ruder about Damascius' editor, Ruelle (*nihil fere intellexit*: p. 8 n. 2), whose edition came out in 1889.

[71] A planned course of lectures on the Chaldaean Oracles is several times referred to by Damascius; cp. *Parm.* 9, 21–2; 11, 11–15; 132, 9–10.

come to fruition. Nevertheless the pages consecrated to this subject in his systematic work *On the First Principles* (III, 108–59) come close to constituting a treatise *per se* (despite Damascius' modest statement in III, 159), and, if one adds the discussion contained in his *In Parmenidem* and the random remarks of the *In Phaedonem*, something like a monograph on the theology of the Chaldaean Oracles begins to emerge. More importantly, many oracles are given there in full, or in a different context from that of Proclus, while several others lie unrecognized, concealed in paraphrase in the text.[72] In short there is enough in Damascius for a meaningful—and fresh—reconstruction of the Chaldaean system, which can then be compared with the one that we owe to Psellus as commentator and interpreter of Proclus.

Before approaching Damascius however it is worth remembering that, if all history is contemporary history, all theology is autobiographical. To these truisms one should add the no less obvious statement that any holy book addresses itself to many levels of understanding and piety, and the Bible of the Neoplatonists with its poetic diction and metaphorical language does not constitute an exception to this rule. With these caveats in mind one may turn to Damascius' doubly revealing and highly ambiguous text.

It is easy to see straight away why Damascius remained without a posterity. Much more than any accident of history, it was his own attitude towards the human mind and its possibilities which must be held responsible for his lack of spiritual descendants. For Damascius is a ferocious detractor of any classificatory attempt in the realm of metaphysics—a jester with a philosopher's mask. With great care and meticulousness he constructs superb intellectual edifices, which he then proceeds to contemplate from several angles by cleverly turning them inside out and upside down. In doing this he displays his own thoroughness, subtlety and ingenuity, while at the same time exposing the extreme relativity of these structures, with which our divided intelligence is forever condemned to play as a result of the dislocated state to which the Titanic War has reduced it (*PP* I, 66; III, 92). Tortured by his inability to achieve real synthesis,[73] in his rage Damascius suddenly administers a blow to the edifice which he has so carefully constructed

[72] Cp. *PH* fr. 3A for a possible oracle which I reconstruct as follows: ⟨Ἴσίν τε⟩ ἀενάου ζωῆς ὀχετοῖς ἀμετρήτοις.

[73] See *PP* I, 66: εἰ δὲ ἡ συναίρεσις ἡμᾶς ὑπερβαίνει τοὺς ἐν τῷ τιτανικῷ πολέμῳ διεσπασμένους, τί τὸ θαυμαστόν; The word always used by Damascius in this connection is συναίρεσις, which, *pace* Combès and Galpérine, has the meaning of synthesis: cp. I, 56.

and cherished, and demolishes it. Then, having recourse to a poet's imagery, he derides his attempt, though not without some shedding of tears:

> And yet, if, when we attempt to sound and explore in all its senses the intelligible depths, we fall short of that truth and deviate as we do towards what is low and divided, through being dragged and pulled down towards them by the compulsion of our miserable nothingness, we should nevertheless resign ourselves to this deviation and this fall. For it is not possible in our present state to grasp these things otherwise and we must be content if we can touch them from afar as it were, with great difficulty, very faintly, or indeed if we can gain the trace of a hint which will suddenly flash before our eyes, even though the spark comes from the self, rising out of the soul; a small gleam, not really bright, yet still an indication by analogy of that huge all-shining light. As regards this discourse too, this is the thing for which it should be praised: that it despises itself and confesses itself blinded by that united, intelligible light and unable to stare at it. (*PP* III, 141).

Primarily a poet, with a superb feel for the language which he moulds round his considerable needs, Damascius is an exceptionally ambitious thinker. At the same time he is poignantly aware of the limitations of both human understanding and expression, but quite unwilling to restrict himself to the orbit of his given abilities.[74] A lucid and tenacious fighter in the metaphysical field—as in real life—he appears in our eyes as an intellectual acrobat who is forced to create new terms in response to his emotional and metaphysical leaps.[75] This is indeed what happens when he attempts to grasp and describe the sternly apophatic region of the Beyond.

The Beyond

Far beyond the transcendent One (*PP* I, 84; cf. fr. 16) lies the hypercosmic abyss (*PP* III, 144; fr. 18 and *Parm.* 16. 6) or sanctuary of silence (*PP* I, 84),[76] the secret world which summarizes in itself all worlds (*PP* III,

[74] There is a tragic helplessness in expressions like the following: ἀλλ' ὅμως (. . .) ἀνερεθιστέον τὰς ἐν ἡμῖν ἀρρήτους ὠδῖνας εἰς τὴν ἄρρητον (οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως εἴπω) συναίσθησιν τῆς ὑπερηφάνου ταύτης ἀληθείας. Note the usage of the ambivalent word ὑπερήφανος. On the relativity of language, *PP* II, 59 ff., *PP* III, 96 etc.

[75] Next to a considerable number of neologisms (παντοΰχος, ὑπεράγνοια etc.), Damascius often gives his own peculiar meaning to already existing words (ἐγκεντρίζω in *Parm.*).

[76] Other expressions denoting the unclassifiable ἀκοσμία, which is more harmonious than any κόσμος (*Parm.* 86), are 'undefined depths' (III, 92), 'impossible beginning' (I, 84), 'the infinite' (*Parm.* 65, 14) which is both ἀπρόοδον and ἀνάριθμον (*Parm.* 87).

[77] Conversely for Proclus the One is beyond all this: *Parm.* 1171, 4: εἴτε γὰρ γαλήνη τίς ἐστιν ὑμνουμένη νοερὰ παρὰ τοῖς σοφοῖς, εἴτε ὅρμος μυστικός, εἴτε σιγὴ δηλον ὡς

91).[77] Damascius describes it as an as yet unmanifested birth-pang for the cosmic Form, a pre-suffering for the coming into being of all the partial intelligible births. It is the realm of non-being (*PP* II, 91)—also equated with the Orphic Night—that we in our touching ignorance attempt to classify and adorn (*PP* III, 144). Below this ἀπρόοδον καὶ ἀνάριθμον ἄπειρον (*Parm.* 86, 87)—the infinite which is not subject to procession and number—the Oracles place the unorganized, undisciplined (ἀσύντακτος) cause of being, itself beyond essence and intellection (*PP* II, 2); being beyond even the One, it too is an entity beyond knowledge and ignorance, an object of *hyperignorance.*

Reminiscent of the Gnostic *agnosia*, Damascius' neologism is crucial to our understanding of the subtleties of his negative theology: hyper-ignorance is our natural state of mind when it comes to anything of importance; it governs us as we move on to the next metaphysical stage and attempt to grasp the One: our perception of it is overshadowed by ὑπεράγνοια (*PP* I, 84)—metaphysical ignorance. Yet we know about it through non-intellectual means, for our experience of the ineffable is a travail which fails to result in child-birth (*PP* I, 86). The metaphor of labour with a view to a spiritual birth is repeatedly used by Plato, but always with a positive hue, pointing to the final delivery and deliverance from pain.[78] Damascius strips this image of any exhilarating connotations and turns it into a symbol of sterile pain before raising it into the nightmarish leitmotiv which haunts both the *De Principiis* and the *In Parmenidem.* Through 'knowledge in labour' we attempt in our pathetic, divided Titanic condition to reach the most indivisible of things.[79]

This, of course, is a polemical passage directed against Proclus, whose grand systematic edifices Damascius takes pleasure in deconstructing, mainly by attacking the quiet self-confidence which lies behind them. The Oracles, insists Damascius, urge us to forget all our philosophical notions, to discard and reject all definition, and to concentrate solely on this unending pang—the ὠδίς, which is also the ὁδός, a recurrent pun—(*PP* I, 87–8; II, 105; *In Parm.* 28, 31–2), for it is not possible to grasp what is indescribable and unqualifiable (*PP* I, 87) even by 'the flower of the intellect', as Iamblichus had realized (*PP* II, 100). What is needed is a complete emptying of the mind, a state of utter passivity, of annihilation of the self so that 'the gods bestow the view' (*PP* II, 106).

ἁπάντων τῶν τοιούτων ἐξῄρηται τὸ ἕν, ἐπέκεινα ὂν καὶ ἐνεργείας καὶ σιγῆς καὶ ἡσυχίας καὶ πάντων ὁμοῦ τῶν ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἀνυμνουμένων στασίμων συνθημάτων.

[78] Cp. *Symp.* 206d; *Phaedr.* 251e; *Rep.* 490b.

[79] *PP* I, 87: τοῦτο τιτανικὸν πάσχομεν καὶ ὅμως τοῦτο τὸ πάθος ἐπὶ τὸ πάντων ἀγιώτατον καὶ παντὸς ὅλου ἀμερέστατον ἀνάγειν ἐπιχειροῦμεν.

168

It is not with vehemence that you should attempt to conceive that Intelligible
But by the subtle flame of a subtle mind, (a flame) which measures all things
Except that Intelligible. You must not perceive it
Intently but, while keeping the pure eye of your soul averted,
You should lend the Intelligible an empty mind
So that you may comprehend it. For it exists outside the mind. (fr. 1)[80]

This passivity in God is described by Damascius in connection with another Chaldaean fragment as 'more perfect than all power of self-movement, as being a supernatural movement from without',[81] an illumination which may or may not come despite human effort. Typically, when commenting on the same passage, Proclus' emphasis is on action rather than passivity, on human initiative rather than divine grace which is granted anyway; thus for Proclus the particle of the divine fire bestowed by the Father on the descended soul has to be activated by a series of operations both ritual and moral before the specific personality may move out of the orbit of fate.[82]

Does the all-encompassing 'vision' which follows the emptying of the mind reach as far as the chaotic darkness of the Beyond? What does it include? Is it a progressive experience from the divided to the One, as in Plotinus or Proclus, or is it a sudden, unconscious and ineffable gift, as in Numenius? The impossibility of answering these questions is reflected in Damascius' refusal to endow us with clear-cut certainties at any level of his description of the Oracles' theology. Confines are continuously blurred and the triptych Abyss—Meta-being—One is as undivided as the next—if the expression 'next' means anything in this context—stage of the intelligible ennead.

Trinitarian Theology

Is it an ennead or a triad? In one place (*PP* III, 116) Damascius declares it to be neither, and in a series of passages of great poetic beauty and poignancy he attempts to answer the question:

what is this intelligible ennead that we celebrate? It is merely a way of indicating the total perfection of the triad above, and which we divide into three in our inability to embrace with the mind its full perfection, its comprising the All, its governing all plurality, its engendering all triads wherever and in whatever manner they happen to be, its leading all procession to the ultimate degree, its unbridled generating power . . .—all these concepts should be united into one

[80] See the verbose analysis of this oracle in Proclus, *CP* D (pp. 210–11).
[81] Cp. *In Phaed.* I, 169 and fr. 130.
[82] For the full context, see *In Tim.* III, 266, 16 ff.

meta-concept, which would be a mere hint towards the understanding of the first triad. (*PP* III, 132)

And in a further attempt to convey the nature of what is simple but appears as plurality, and is treated as triadic by us 'who see as in a mirror' (ὥσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ὁρῶντες), Damascius evokes the illusory decomposition of the light of the sun into the colours of the rainbow (*PP* III, 142).

At least one thing seems certain, that with what our mind understands as triads we have entered the sphere of Being—we have left transcendence. Before, even the One—'the cause of all essence, but not yet essence itself'—[83] was beyond (τὸ πάντων ἐπέκεινα). In one passage Damascius describes the ἕν and ὄν (the one and being) as ἀμφιπρόσωπον (ambi-faced), suggesting to the imagination a Janus figure guarding the door of transcendence. The ennead seems to be facing us and constitutes for Damascius a 'periphrastic' way of referring to the noetic or intelligible triad (*PP* III, 141), which he views from various angles: in specific Chaldaean terms its three principles are the Father, the Power, and the Paternal Intellect (*PP* III, 137; II, 102), but also being, life and knowledge (*PP* II, 173; III, 127), or existence, power, and action (*PP* II, 71). In its mythological aspect (which is no less Chaldaean) the primordial triad can be identified with Cronus (or some Oriental counterpart), Rhea, and Zeus, the demiurgic principle *par excellence*, who then proceeds to emanate unending series of beings in a twofold fashion, homonymously and heteronymously (*PP* III, 31), giving rise in this way to the variety of creation, but at the same time preserving its essential unity in a cosmic order in which, as Damascius specifically states, 'it is not easy to distinguish the emanating principle from the emanation'—the vehicled from the vehicle (*PP* II, 93; III, 126). And of course the Pythagorean and Platonic notions of the monad, the dyad and the triad/united (*PP* III, 115) or the limit, the limitless and the mixed (πέρας, ἀπειρία, and μικτὸν) (*PP* III, 137) fit the Chaldaean triad perfectly.

Finally Damascius uses a simple geometric figure in order to convey the character of the triad and its function: 'we divide the intelligible triad into three' (*PP* III, 153) and make its parts run horizontally and vertically; thus producing (*a*) a paternal triad, (*b*) a dynamic triad, and (*c*) an intellectual triad, each comprising in itself father, power, and intellect (*PP* III, 145). An even more helpful model is that of 'an immaterial circle', with the One as its centre, the dyad as its radius, and the intellect as its circumference hurrying back to the One (*PP* III, 135–6); indeed, this is a

[83] Αἴτιον μὲν πάσης οὐσίας, οὔπω δὲ οὐσία (*PP* III, 153).

model which conveys as accurately as possible the monistic character of Chaldaean theology where, in Damascius' words, the second and the third principles are constantly swallowed by the peak of being (*PP* III, 147). Dominated by the basic Neoplatonic scheme of manence—procession—return, Damascius tries to find ways of conveying it in Chaldaean terms; he thus states that 'the knowledge of the νοῦς returns to being through life' ((ἡ γνῶσις τοῦ νοῦ διὰ ζωῆς ἐπιστρέφεσθαι πέφυκε πρὸς οὐσίαν, *PP* II, 101), and repeats that the qualities of the second and the third principle of the Chaldaean triad are contained in the first, though not vice-versa (*PP* II, 88). His insistence on what he sees as the Oracles' emphasis on the destruction of the triadic character of being rather than on its affirmation is for Damascius the surest means of bolstering Platonic monism, dislocated by the analysis of so many generations of interpreters.

For in all worlds shines the triad whose ruler is the monad. (fr. 27)

Emphasis on unity, concentration on 'the simply one' (ἁπλῶς ἕν), is the way in which one should grasp that which is 'unarithmetic, untriadic, un-oned' (ἀνάριθμον, ἀτρίαστον, ἀμονάδιστον). We should realize when discussing the Oracles that the principles 'are neither one nor three nor even three in one'. It is only we who, in our human way of comprehending 'the realities which lie beyond all intellect, life and essence, use these names' (*PP* III, 140). Does this sentence contain an attack on Christian trinitarian theology and, by the way, a criticism of the literal way in which Proclus understands the Oracles by someone who thought that classification was just a convention and not a metaphysical entity?[84] It is not possible to tell.

Damascius' main concern as commentator of the Oracles is to preach rather than prove that even in the material world the overpowering tendency is monistic (*Parm.* 87), or rather unitive. Whether this interpretation was prompted by his contact with late Zoroastrianism, with which Damascius clearly became acquainted as a guest of Khusrau Anushirwan in Ctesiphon, is again impossible to tell.[85] But the

[84] See e.g. III, 92 (ἐτολμήσαμεν κατηγορῆσαι τοῦ νοητοῦ τὴν τριχῇ διαίρεσιν), a passage where Damascius declares our reasoning faculty to be a result of the fall. God's μονότης is inaccessible to the human intellect and can only be apprehended through the mystic experience: μὴ ἐπὶ δακτύλων ἀριθμῶμεν τὸ νοητόν, μηδὲ διωρισμέναις ἐννοίαις αὐτοῦ ἁπτώμεθα, ἀλλὰ πάντα συνελόντες ὁμοῦ νοήματα, καὶ μύσαντες, τὸ ἓν καὶ μέγιστον ὄμμα ἀνοίξαντες τῆς ψυχῆς, ᾧ καθορᾶται διακρινόμενον οὐδέν (. . .) ἐκεῖσε βλέποντες, εἰ καὶ πόρρωθεν καὶ οἷον ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων, ὅμως ὀψώμεθα τὸ νοητόν, ὅτι δή ἐστι πάντῃ ἀδιάκριτον. (*PP* III, 136).

[85] Khusrau was interested in philosophy (Agathias II, 28–31), and must have had many

passionate insistence with which he denies plurality even as a methodological device has a clear polemic intent and is probably aimed at targets closer at home: 'the idiom of numbers', he thunders on one occasion, 'is but a symbolic way of referring to realities which are unarithmetic and absolutely unqualifiable' (*PP* III, 135). Again, he bursts out on the subject of the Oracles probably against his students:

> let us not attempt to count the intelligible on our fingers or grasp it by means of definitions, but, by seizing all concepts together and closing our eyes, let us open the one great eye of the soul which sees nothing as distinct (. . .) Seeing through this eye, even though from afar and as if from the very extremities, we will nevertheless perceive the intelligible and see that it is absolutely undifferentiated and unarithmetic. And yet, though this is how it is, it will also appear to us, if one may say so, as simplicity, plurality and totality, for the intelligible is one, many and all, to put in a triple way its single nature. (*PP* III, 136)

He could not have been more explicit.

Whether arithmetically, ontologically, existentially, mythologically, or schematically defined, the triad defies definition, and the very multiplicity of its manifestations is a sign of its ungraspability. It is within the confines of this metaphysical logic that we should try and place the various triadic entities of the Chaldaean system, for which Psellus, following Proclus, claimed a spatial allocation. Damascius by contrast claims as their territory a distorted, non-Euclidean space. And while doing this he warns us again that we define not according to truth (*κατ' ἀλήθειαν*, *PP* III, 123), but by analogy (*κατ' ἀναλογίαν*), since our organ of perception is 'something far dimmer than even the logical and human soul' (*PP* III, 121).[86]

Iynges, Connectors, Teletarchs

It is in a passage of rare polemical violence against Proclus (and Syrianus) that Damascius first defines the *origin* of the Chaldaean

theoretical discussions with Damascius and his colleagues during the latter's stay at his court; as becomes apparent from a work addressed to him by Priscianus (surviving only in a Latin translation) under the revealing title *Answers to the questions asked by Chosroes, King of the Persians, CAG*, Suppl. 1 part 2 (I. Bywater) 1886, Khusrau held discussions with his guests on the nature of the soul, its relation to the body and fate after death, on dreams and visions, and on important subjects of geography and anthropology. On Khusrau's intellectual curiosity, see A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1944), 2nd edn., 427–31, and more recently, N. Garsoian, 'Byzantium and the Sassanians', *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3 (1) (Cambridge, 1983), 577; J. Duchesne-Guillemin 'Zoroastrian Religion', ibid. 895. On Khusrau's more general interest in Greek philosophy, E. Zeller and R. Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci nel suo sviluppo storico VI: Giamblico e la Scuola di Atene* (Florence, 1961), no. III (pp. 227–8).

[86] Cp. *PP* III, 57: *πάντα εἰδητικὰ νοοῦμεν, ἴσως δὲ καὶ ψυχικά.*

diacosmic triads, the iynges, the maintainers, and the teletarchs. These triadic powers, which operate throughout the worlds,[87] are produced by the Paternal Intellect in its undivided capacity as a henad (*PP* III, 110–11). And while each one is in itself divided into father, power, and intellect, they also enjoy their own peculiar nature as triads of the intermediary (intelligent) world: the iynges have a paternal character, the maintainers a potential or dynamic one and the teletarchs an intellectual nature (*PP* III, 145). Let us now consider these entities one by one.

The extreme ambiguity and elusiveness which is proper to the Chaldaean system naturally extends to the 'thoughts of the Father' or iynges.[88] Identified with the Platonic Ideas, and therefore seen as monads (*PP* III, 118), the iynges are also purveyors of unity in their character of magical instruments.[89] In its schematic representation, an iynx is a cone which begins in unity and becomes plurality through a vertiginous multiplication of itself. By producing a multitude of offspring and then seizing them all and swallowing them up in an act of true synthesis, the iynx suggests to Damascius the giddy movement of the soul's ascent towards the divine; 'this is why it is said that it snatches the souls upwards' (*Parm.* 95), a process which, as Damascius is at pains to remind us, owes nothing to magical means: for 'it is clear', he remarks in his *In Phaedonem*, 'that the man who follows the way of initiation in a foolish manner will not reap its fruits' (I, 168).

Μία γὰρ ἡ νοητὴ συνέχεια πάντων τῶν τοιούτων: 'the intelligible coherence of all these things is one' (*PP* II, 36, 13, cf. *Parm.* 60) is the sentence with which Damascius punctuates his discussion of the Oracles' theology. And it is within this logic of extendable unity between Man and the Beyond that we should contemplate the function of the maintainers (or connectors). As their name indicates, they are creators of cohesion (*Parm.* 44). They are also described as holopoioi (unifiers or synthesizers)[90] of the intellectual worlds and guardians of the unity of the cosmos;[91] they have, so to speak, a normalizing role in the cosmic economy and so do the teletarchs, or perfectors, who are envisaged by Damascius as initiators or even guides at all stages of the soul's striving towards spiritual union (fr. 85).

In their unending emanational capacity, the iynges, the maintainers,

[87] Cp. *Parm.* 59–60 with frs. 76, 80, 81, 82, 83.

[88] Fr. 76: the iynges are many; cf. *Parm.* 88. For Proclus' use of an iynx for magical purposes, see above, n. 62.

[89] Characterized in *Parm.* 98 as *συναγωγοί*.

[90] Fr. 83 and *Parm.* 43.

[91] *PP* III, 145; *Parm.* 125 and fr. 82.

and the teletarchs are understood by Damascius to be the totally benign powers present in all worlds—the empyrian, the aetherial, the material (*Parm.* 59, 87). Whether as rays of the visible sun (that is as material maintainers (fr. 80)) or as metaphysical paradigms (that is as intelligible iynges), they personify grace at all levels of existence. For grace, which is implicit in the act of emanation,[92] is a universal force for the Platonist, pre-eternally present in the world, working for salvation independently of any individual action or even existence. It is everybody's inalienable possession, which cannot be lost or snatched away, though it may lie unused by the individual who has fallen asleep.

The Dispensation of Grace

Mental sleep however—'the only Neoplatonist hell'[93]—is a very real danger, because unity is not the most obvious characteristic of the world when we contemplate it from the standpoint of sense-perception. The reason for this, as the oracle states, is that

> an intellectual girdling membrane separates (fr.6)

the material world from the spheres above (*Parm.* 131). This is the so-called ὑπεζωκώς. Life on the other hand is a triadic unity, where, depending on individual circumstances, the intelligent, the logical, or the illogical factor may prevail (*Parm.* 157). The iynges, the maintainers, and the teletarchs cannot operate in favour of the individual who has fallen asleep and does not even suspect in his terrestrial hell that he is potentially one with an eternal, undifferentiated whole. Another benign power however—the triad of the inexorables—is there to help. Working either individually or collectively, the inexorables mend the severance caused by the ὑπεζωκὼς—the girdling membrane—in the fabric of unity (*Parm.* 131–2). Like the three magical fathers, who oversee sensible creation (*Parm.* 204), the inexorables are 'mediators between the Father and matter' (*Parm.* 201), which is far from being described by Damascius as a positively evil power.

It is within the logic of mediation that this austerely monistic system—at least as Damascius understands it—finds a place for the main saviour-gods of later antiquity. Attis, Adonis, Sabazius, and Dionysus (all of them mortals who gained divinity through love and suffering, and achieved unity for having known fragmentation and even

[92] Cp. fr. 82 and *Parm.* 125.

[93] J. Trouillard, 'Procession néoplatonicienne et création judéo-chrétienne', *Les Cahiers de Fontenay*, March 1981 (Mélanges Trouillard), 13.

dismemberment) hold key positions in the theology of the Oracles, and their functions harmonize an astrological understanding of the cosmos with the requirements of a world-view solidly based on the workings of Providence (*Parm.* 44, 214).

Uninterested in the astrological dimension of the Oracles (at least if we are to judge by what survives of his work), uninterested even in the soteriological role of the theurgists, Damascius is the *philosophical* exegete of Chaldaean grace. More than any other theme, what governs his interpretation of the Oracles is a passionate insistence on the axiom of return. Indeed, whenever a reference to creation is made, his overwhelming emphasis is on the final absorption of the created by the emanating first principle. Thus Zeus, the creator *par excellence*, returns perpetually through Rhea to Cronos, who is the creator in an absolute sense

> arranging matter not by action but with his mind[94]

within a cosmic order in which the real coincides with the potential, where the word or even the thought coincides with the deed.[95] In his purely Chaldaean hypostasis as Twice Beyond (Δὶς Ἐπέκεινα) or Adad, Zeus hastens back to the Once Beyond (Ἅπαξ Ἐπέκεινα) or Ad, through the ministrations of All-luminous Hekate (ἀμφιφαὴς Ἑκάτη).[96] Finally, as creative intellect, Zeus becomes absorbed by the pure intellect by means of the life-giving intellect, the ζωογόνος νοῦς (*PP* III, 118).

Thus it is by means of both a philosophical and a mythological language that Damascius explains the great mystery of return as preached by the Oracles: to be saved one must first be incarnated; then Rhea (identified with life) will provide the path of return. It is indeed Rhea in her manifestation as Nature[97] 'who sets before us as unity the dual life, the mundane and the supramundane' (*Parm.* 215). This elliptic sentence, which qualifies the Chaldaean axiom that differentiation begins at the level of life (*PP* III, 126, cf. 43), contains two separate propositions: first, that from the point of view of the living everything is simultaneously enacted on two levels—the mundane and the supramundane—corresponding to two ways of being—that of 'the individual

[94] *Parm.* 214 (cf. 133), surely a Chaldaean Oracle in extended prose form, repeated again in *Parm.* 284; note the resemblance with fr. 5.

[95] Two oracles (frs. 22 and 25) preserved by Proclus make this explicit. See also Proclus, *Parm.* 895, 6–7: from the point of view of the paternal intellect τὰ ὄντα νοήσεις εἰσὶ καὶ αἱ νοήσεις τὰ ὄντα.

[96] *Parm.* 152, cf. 154, 15 ff.

[97] *Parm.* 157: on Rhea: αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ φύσις.

and perishable man' (ὁ ἄτομος καὶ φθαρτός), who is aware only of the divisible or Titanic world, and 'the archetypal and perennial man' (ὁ κοινὸς καὶ ἀίδιος ἄνθρωπος), who is the paradigm of the species and as such forms the goal of all existence (*Parm.* 203).[98] The second proposition is that Rhea-Nature is a guide and initiator who reveals the unity of the two worlds and makes it possible for man to cross the border which separates his Titanic from his divine condition. Unlike Proclus, who identifies Nature with Fate and urges us to avert our gaze from it,[99] Damascius takes a positive view of its role as a cosmic manifestation. Indeed, as a great traveller in search of the sacred, he can appreciate both its beauty and its moralizing power,[100] seeing Nature as a reminder of return rather than an instigator of perdition.

6. THE COMPARISON WITH PROCLUS

Even a superficial comparison between Proclus and Damascius as adepts and exegetes of Chaldaean mysticism reveals salient differences in the approach of the two men. Proclus comes across as a more literal reader of the Oracles, indeed as one who has a Euclidean conception of theological space; at the same time he also appears as one with a warmer, more psychic understanding of the Chaldaean methodology of ascent, which he presents in a practical—if forbidding[101]—way.

Unlike Damascius and his mentor Isidore, Proclus was a firm believer in religious practice, conceived as both a cultic routine and an ethical code.[102] He taught that for the committed adept there would at some point shine the trinity of Chaldaean virtues correspondingly emanating from the triple hypostasis of the noetic gods: faith from goodness, truth from wisdom, love from beauty.[103] The crucial—and highest—virtue is faith and it is on faith alone that any hope of salvation

[98] Again this dichotomy of man into an ephemeral and an eternal being, which sounds like a commentary on Plato *Tim.* 27d, surely comes from an oracle which cannot be reproduced in its poetic form.

[99] See fr. 102 with the Proclean commentary, *PT* v, 119. Even as a creation of the demiurge, Nature holds third rank, as προελθοῦσα μόνον, unlike higher types of creation which remain wholly or partly unmanifested: *In Tim.* I, 12.

[100] See *JHS* 113, 5–6; on the sanctity of Nature, see Damascius' *In Phaed.* I, 499.

[101] Those among his pupils who found his rules forbidding were many: cp. the horror of Isidore when he was ordered by Proclus to wear a coarse cloak (Damascius, *PH* fr. 59B). Others, like the Antiochene Hilarius, could not even begin to follow Proclus' injunctions: *PH* fr. 91AB.

[102] See e.g. *In Tim.* I, 212, 15 ff.; *In Tim.* II, 312; *In Remp.* II, 99; fr. 135 (*In Alc.* 40); *In Remp.* I, 110–11.

[103] For this and what follows, *PT* I, 100–13 and *In Alc.* 51–67.

should be founded. 'Superior to the cognitive faculty',[104] the Proclean faith, which takes its flight on the twin wings of truth and love, feeds on complete freedom from doubt and thus leads one to 'the secure haven' beyond. Surprisingly, for this Platonist the name of *unio mystica* is faith, not love. Another key is ritual observance: while salvation can be gained through the ardour of love or the rigours of philosophy, it is theurgy alone that provides the perfect way, surpassing as it does all human wisdom and science since it comprises in itself the benefits of divination and the purifying powers of initiation along with all the effects of divine possession.[105] It is only once one has embarked, under the action of blind faith, on the journey of ascent—a journey that Proclus conceives and describes in concrete objective, indeed magical, terms[106]—that 'wisdom begins to ache for the intelligible' and beauty emits 'a fore-radiance of the divine light' which is about to reveal itself (*PT* I, 108, 20 ff.). However, as the virtue corresponding to the good, Chaldaean faith (towards which the devotee must train himself by starving the demands of both the senses and the mind) is a cosmic entity and as such it can be sympathetically enhanced by the theurgist's concurring love.

It must be no coincidence that all the Chaldaean fragments on love, either as a benign universal principle or an asphyxiating human concern, have entered our collection through Proclus.[107] He warns us in his usual didactic style against the effects of wanton love,[108] but also provides a full analysis based on the Oracles' theology of the diverse nature and universal function of Eros as a transcendent, existential, and illuminating force[109] which binds together the elements whether in their physical or metaphysical aspect. It is within this cosmic logic of unity and union through love that Proclus proclaims his optimistic message that the theurgist's ascending practice brings salvation to humanity at large: at that moment 'imitating his own god by whom he is possessed, the divine lover breaks away and leads upwards the well-born, perfects the imper-

104 *Τὸ γὰρ τοιοῦτον τῆς πίστεως γένος πρεσβύτερόν ἐστι τῆς γνωστικῆς ἐνεργείας*: *PT* I, 110.

105 A close paraphrase of *PT* I, 25 (p. 113, 4 ff.)

106 *In Crat.* 31: the gods put their own secret symbols within what they produce; these symbols are *ἄρρητα, ἄγνωστα καὶ τὸ δραστήριον αὐτῶν καὶ κινητικὸν ὑπεραίρει πᾶσαν νόησιν*. Cp. *In Tim.* I, 211, 8–28; 212, 19–25; *In Remp.* II, 99 and esp. *In Parm.* 990, 27–911, 1 for trespassers.

107 It is safe to assume that fr. 44 which has been transmitted by Lydus owes its ultimate provenance to Proclus.

108 *In Remp.* I, 176 for the Chaldaean *πνιγμὸν ἔρωτος ἀληθοῦς* referring to human love; other expressions denoting sexual love are *ψευδώνυμος* and *ὁ ἕτερος*, to be found in *In Alc.* 50, 23 and 53, 12 respectively.

109 For the distinction, *In Alc.* 64–5 and *In Tim.* II, 54.

fect, and provides success to those in need of salvation' (*In Alc.* 53, 9–12). In other words in his sweeping ascent towards the realm of 'singing light' the theurgist bolsters the struggle of everyone who strives consciously or unconsciously towards union.

Damascius too has a trinity of virtues drawn from the Chaldaean Oracles, which is certainly sterner than Proclus' purifying and uplifting triad of faith, truth, and love, and at the same time indicative of his priorities: virtue, wisdom, and thought-engendering truth (*ἀρετή, σοφία καὶ πολύφρων ἀτρέκεια*, *Parm.* 45) replace in his understanding of Chaldaean soteriology the fervour of faith and love.

All along Damascius conveys a picture of Chaldaean theory and practice from the cosmic rather than the human point of view, the objective rather than the subjective, and this may be the reason why there is so little on any form of practice. There are no descriptions in his two treatises of the gradual extinction of the personality in its flight towards the One. The human perspective is absent even as a point of departure and what we have instead is a highly cerebral, impersonal account of noetic realities in didactic form. Thus the mystic union is described in terms of a negative gnosiology: *ἡ γνῶσις ἀναχεῖται εἰς ἀγνωσίαν* (*PP* 1, 84). This of course may be a true reflection of the style of the Oracles themselves, rather than a comment on Damascius, a consideration which ushers in a final crucial question: what is the relation of the Chaldaean Oracles with contemporary literature?

7. A THEOLOGICAL *KOINE*: THE LANGUAGE OF REVELATION

In the Chaldaean Oracles the gods speak directly, describing the structure of the universe, alluding to what lies beyond, and handing down to mankind a set of moral injunctions and ritual rules. The style is authoritative and the theological language apophatic, yet what lends the Chaldaean message such an austere tone and at the same time sets it apart from other holy books of later antiquity is the lack of a central myth. No allegorical interpretation based either on a charter myth or on a historical narrative is to be detected anywhere in the surviving fragments and this is what makes this collection appear so different from the Orphic hymns with which the Oracles were constantly compared and combined by their adepts.[110]

The Orphic hymns however were merely the compositions of the

[110] Characteristically the teacher of Proclus, Syrianus, had written a treatise in ten books on the Agreement of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato with the Chaldaean Oracles: Suda s.v.

theologoi, that is the work of men; they were not the words of the *theoi* themselves. Indeed what the tone and content of the Chaldaean revelation brings to mind is the poem of Parmenides whose genesis may have been marked by the same circumstances as that of the Oracles if we are prepared to consider the bold suggestion of Martin West.[111] The only other contemporary literary products with which the Chaldaean Oracles can be compared are late antique oracles proper, indeed those oracles which A. D. Nock qualified as 'theological' in a brief but important article of 1928.[112] The metre, the language, the tone, the style, the ideas, and above all the negative theology are extraordinarily similar.

In the last decade or so epigraphists and historians have joined forces in researching one of the most intriguing phenomena of late antique intellectual history, that of the revival of oracles in the second and third centuries. A study of the surviving oracular literature from that period reveals two main concerns: the proclamation of an unambiguous monotheism and the reform of cult to match a more spiritual conception of the divine. What the oracles do in fact is to provide supernatural authority for the philosophical *koine* of the age and the cultic practices dictated by it.[113]

If monotheism was the universal religious idiom of the men of late antiquity, revelation was increasingly becoming the prominent methodology of communicating it.[114] As in the Hermetic treatises the truth is revealed by the gods; then it is incumbent on men to assemble the dispersed tokens of revealed wisdom into a corpus, study it, comment upon and propagate it. The Chaldaean Oracles were already a corpus, divinely assembled and communicated to humanity as a complete sacred text. Another such collection, heavily based on Didymean material, was produced, probably at the end of the third century, by Porphyry.[115] His *Philosophy from the Oracles* has its counterpart in the work of another contemporary Roman Platonist, Cornelius Labeo, who collected, and doubtless interpreted, revelations of the Clarian Apollo.[116] Until recently such collections were considered by scholars to be literary

[111] *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971), 221–6.

[112] 'Oracles théologiques', *REA* 30 (1928), 280–90 [= *Essays* i. 160–8].

[113] See my articles 'The Fate of Oracles in Late Antiquity: Didyma and Delphi', *DChrAE* 15 (1989–90), 271–8 and 'Philosophers and Oracles: Shifts of Authority in Late Paganism', *Byzantion* 62 (1992), 45–62.

[114] Obviously commentary and interpretation remained the more common—if secondary—way of disclosing paganism's monotheistic core.

[115] For the late date, see *JRS* 71 (1981), 180.

[116] On the date of Cornelius Labeo, see *JRS* 71 (1981), 180.

forgeries, but, as more stones inscribed with oracles turn up in the cities of Greece and Asia Minor, this view is being amended and we can at last look at them in the way in which they were considered by their contemporaries. But the crucial difference between the Chaldaean and the Apollinian revelation to the men of late antiquity resided in the fact that the former had been (or was believed to be) handed down as a perfect corpus.

Volumes made up of authentic oracles and stressing the unity of the new transcendental theology clearly helped its propagation. It is even possible that, in producing their collections, men like Porphyry and Labeo did not act wholly spontaneously, but responded to invitations to conduct research in the archives of the oracles and to help proclaim that God is One by producing a publication which would both codify and spread the new theology. As their subsequent history and frequent quotation show, these collections enjoyed widespread circulation and were eagerly plundered by Christians to whom they suggested the ingenious idea that they could be used, with the necessary adjustments, to prove that the Greek gods had foretold the birth of Christ and the triumph of Christian trinitarian theology.

A case in point is provided by the *Tübingen Theosophy*, so-called from the codex which transmitted it, which formed under the title *Oracles of the Greek Gods* the eighth book of a larger composition called *Theosophia*.[117] The eleven books of the *Theosophia*, now largely lost, attempted to prove the superiority of Christianity over all other theologies, Greek and Oriental. Very akin in spirit to works like the *Ammonius* by Zacharias of Mytilene and the *Theophrastus* by Aeneas of Gaza, the *Theosophia* is known to have been composed during Zeno's reign, and comes across as a typical product of the intellectual climate of Alexandria in the 480s, mirroring the philosophical quarrels between pagans and Christians in Horapollo's school, so vividly portrayed in Zacharias of Mytilene's *Life of Severus* and in Damascius' *Philosophical History*, quarrels which resulted in the great pagan persecution of 488/9 and in Damascius' eventual flight from Alexandria.[118]

According to chapter 13 of the *Theosophia Tubingensis*, to the rather irreverent question of a certain Theophilus 'are *you*, or another, God?', Apollo at Claros answered as follows:

[117] The fragments are now re-edited by H. Erbse, *Theosophorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1995).

[118] For a fuller treatment, see *PH*, Appendix III. Erbse (*op. cit.* pp. xiii–xv) thinks that the author of the *Theosophia* was an educated Christian writing in Alexandria under Zeno and addressing monks and clerics on the utility of Greek literature.

180

> Born of himself, untaught, motherless, immovable,
> Not contained in a name, many-named, dwelling in fire
> This is God. We angels are but a particle of God.

Carved on an altar-shaped relief on a block of stone in the city wall of Oenoanda, between Lycia and Phrygia, this oracle has also come down to us in several versions through various literary channels, pagan and Christian.[119] But what interests us here is that in his *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, Hans Lewy identifies it along with another three *Theosophia* oracles (nos. 21, 27, 35) as Chaldaean.[120] As E. R. Dodds immediately pointed out, he was wrong in his identification,[121] but only as regards the letter, not the spirit of this literature. Indeed this is where the lasting achievement of Lewy's book lies: even if he did not formulate it in the right scholastic terms, he recognized the unity of late antique revelatory literature and understood the contemporary procedures which tended towards the formulation of a dogma based on the orthodox interpretation of a canon of sacred texts. The angels of whom the oracle speaks, and among whom Apollo counts himself, also belong to the theological *koine* of the period and it would be idle to attempt to identify them as of Jewish or Gnostic, Chaldaean or Platonic origin.[122] It is only worth pointing out that by this demotion of the old pantheon and its identification with mere angels, philosophic monotheism could accommodate tradition. We possess a number of oracles from this period by which cities and individual priests enquire about the hierarchical position of gods and the honours due to them. The answers are consistent with the new theology: a more spiritualized form of piety than the one associated with blood sacrifices is expected by the prophetic shrines. 'I do not want hecatombs and golden colossi, but sweet songs'[123] proclaims the Didymaean Apollo in the third century, repeating more or less the injunction of Ammon to a delegation from Cyzicus a hundred years earlier.[124]

Rather than in a 'Platonic Underworld', we are in a universal Platonic world, what I would label 'the late antique spiritual Commonwealth', which by the time of Damascius stretches from southern Arabia to the Black Sea coast and from Carthage to Harran. As has been recently

[119] For a list, Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 171. See the discussion by S. Mitchell in the present volume, pp. 86–92.

[120] Lewy, 8–65.

[121] *HThR* 54 (1961), 265–6.

[122] For such a discussion L. Robert, *CRAI* (1971), 613–14. Cf. *Theos. Tub.* 27–8.

[123] Rehm, *Didyma* II, 217.

[124] R. Merkelbach and E. Schwertheim, *Epigraphica Anatolica*, ii (1983), 147–54.

argued by G. Bowersock,[125] in its sweeping move towards unity and universality, Hellenism delivered the ethnic minorities of the Roman world from their parochialism—cultural, religious, and linguistic. Moreover, by integrating into one pyramidal monotheistic structure their local gods through the complementary processes of syncretism and hierarchization, Hellenism prepared the ground for the reception of another monotheism, Islam, and, I would add, not only in its external, but mainly in its mystical dimension.[126]

This spiritual globalization has its roots in Antonine times. The esoteric teaching of mystery religions, the Magical Papyri, the agonizing questions of men to their gods in private ceremonies or public shrines, and the writings of intellectuals alike make an increasing claim towards uniformity. There is a tendency in all this away from pluralism and relativism, a need for one answer to each question, which already points towards the Middle Ages. The formulation of an orthodoxy based on the correct interpretation of a canon of texts does not merely dominate Christianity; it dominates paganism too. And it is precisely in this connection that the Chaldaean Oracles should be seen as a landmark, both in their capacity as a revelation given in the late second century, and as an increasingly sacred text looming larger than all other revelations and finally obliterating them. In the late fifth century Proclus 'used to say that if it were in his power he would have preserved only the Chaldaean Oracles and the *Timaeus*, destroying all other books' as positively harmful to humanity.[127]

By the sixth century the understanding of the Oracles constituted the ultimate criterion of philosophical proficiency. Asclepiodotus of Alexandria and Aphrodisias, whose original mind still haunts the pages of Simplicius, is described by Damascius in the following terms:

> Asclepiodotus' mind was not perfect, as most people thought. He was extremely sharp at raising questions, but not so acute in his understanding. His was an uneven intelligence, especially when it came to divine matters—the invisible and intelligible concept of Plato's lofty thought. Even more wanting was he in the field of higher wisdom—the Orphic and Chaldaean lore which transcends philosophical common sense (τὸν κοινὸν φιλοσοφίας νοῦν).[128]

[125] *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990), together with my review *JRS* 82 (1992).

[126] See now in this respect, P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (Oxford, 1995), *passim*, and esp. 371–91, 'From Empedocles to the Sufis: "The Pythagorean Leaven" '.

[127] Marinus, *VP* 38.

[128] *PH* fr. 85A.

182

The last thing to command respect in the religious world of late antiquity was 'philosophical common sense'. What was needed instead was a full awareness of the intuitive qualities with which God has endowed us: in the terms of a Chaldaean Oracle preserved by Proclus' spiritual grandson, John Lydus:

> Having mixed the spark of the soul with two concordant elements,
> Intellect and divine will, he added a third—pure love—
> As the bond of all things and holy guide.[129]

On its way to becoming the *Ancilla Theologiae*, Philosophy launched into the new world the crucial trinity: human understanding and divine grace bound together by love.

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[129] Fr. 44 preserved in *Mens.* III.

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XIV

Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldaean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon

The Collection and its Transmission

The Chaldaean Oracles are a divine revelation—or so they were believed to be by their Neoplatonic commentators—of a cosmological and soteriological system and of a set of moral and ritual rules and instructions. What survives of them is a total of some 350 lines in Greek hexameter verse divided into 190 fragments of unequal length, the overwhelming majority of which have reached us through two channels: Proclus and, to a lesser extent, Damascius. In Byzantine times, however, Damascius' testimony as transmitter and interpreter of the Chaldaean material was flatly ignored, while Proclus remained an influential figure as exegete of both Plato and the Oracles.[1] It is true that, unlike Damascius, he had produced a systematic—and voluminous—commentary on the Chaldaean revelation, a commentary which was indeed deemed worthy of a refutation by Procopius of Gaza. Yet this pious act was not enough to prevent the Commentary from traversing the so-called dark ages so as to reach men like Arethas and Psellos. The latter in particular was a confessed admirer of Proclus, whom he proclaimed to be at the pinnacle of all science and wisdom.[2]

Intrigued by the Chaldaean Oracles themselves as much as by Proclus' exegesis, Psellos decided to form his own collection and append to it a systematic commentary for the use of his Christian audience. At the same time he epitomized the Proclean commentary in the form both of selections and of summaries; in the case of the latter one may safely assume (with the

[1] On the history and the theology of the Oracles, see Athanassiadi (1999).

[2] Cf. Psellos, *Chron.* 6. 38: *προβαίνων εἰς τὸν θαυμασιώτατον Πρόκλον ὡς ἐπὶ λιμένα μέγιστον κατασχών, πᾶσαν ἐκεῖθεν ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ νοήσεων ἀκρίβειαν ἔσπασα.*

majority of scholars) that the three versions of the theology of the Oracles produced by Psellos for his own use and for that of his friends and students depend directly on Proclus' treatise, rather than deriving from an epitome or a refutation of it.[3]

Subsequently the Proclean Commentary was lost, leaving Psellos' corpus of forty-two oracles as the only collection of Chaldaean wisdom in the Byzantine world. Indeed this is the very text which Plethon came across as he sought a revelation more ancient than both the Judaeo-Christian and the Islamic. Plethon recognized in the hexameters the message of Zoroaster as transmitted by his pupils, none other than *les mages hellénisés*,[4] and he therefore ignored the traditional title of the collection as well as Psellos' commentary, suppressed six oracles and drastically edited the remaining thirty-six. More importantly however, he rearranged their order according to his own philosophical criterion, appended to each fragment a short exegetical note, which makes clear how substantially his own interpretation departs from that of Psellos, and finally added an overall comment (*Βραχεῖά τις διασάφησις τῶν ἐν τοῖς λογίοις τούτοις ἀσαφεστέρως λεγομένων*), where he parts company with all his predecessors who had viewed the Oracles apophatically. By contrast Plethon makes them the vehicle for the formulation of a positive theology represented by an only but not transcendent God.

In doing all this, Plethon produced the first critical edition of the Oracles some 450 years before Wilhelm Kroll.[5] And it is amusing to note that Kroll, who pointedly ignored Plethon when producing his own edition of 1894, was led on in his task by the same logic and editorial philosophy as his Byzantine predecessor. Like Plethon's, Kroll's codification of the material that he found in the Neoplatonists and in Psellos betrays great intellectual curiosity; his purpose, as he himself admits, was to reconstruct the philosophical and theosophical system of the Chaldaeans and not to produce a straightforward

[3] Psellos has transmitted 42 fragments, which cover the entire thematic spectrum of the Oracles, though the emphasis is definitely on ritual and eschatology (cf. *Philosophica minora II*, ed. D. J. O'Meara (Leipzig, 1989), 126–52, including the three expositions of the theology of the Oracles). It has been satisfactorily argued that Psellos depends entirely on Proclus, cf. *Les Oracles chaldaïques*, ed. E des Places (Paris, 1971), 154, and, esp., 203 with references. L. G. Westerink's thesis (1940), according to which Psellos had at his disposal only Proclus' refutation by Procopius of Gaza, has been further undermined by the attribution to the Chaldaean Oracles of a doubtful Heraclitean hexameter deriving from Arethas (West 1968), which provides evidence for the availability of the Proclean commentary beyond the Byzantine 'dark age'. Besides, a careful reading of Psellos' own commentary suggests that he had read Proclus, in the original rather than in the refutation of Procopius, with a sympathetic eye and made his own philological and theological comments with a view to the Christian audience that he was addressing. It must also be pointed out that, despite his criticisms, a conscious effort towards a reconciliation of the Christian with the 'Chaldaean' theology alongside an uncommon involvement with the eschatology and the magical aspect of the Oracles are to be detected throughout.

[4] See Bidez and Cumont (1938).

[5] *De oraculis chaldaicis* (Breslau, 1894).

edition. His arbitrary—by the standards of editorial orthodoxy—codification, which descends from the theoretical to the practical, was unquestioningly adopted seventy-five years later by Des Places, who simply inserted in his edition a few new fragments which had been in the mean time identified as Chaldaean by Bidez and others.[6] Finally, Kroll's order of the Chaldaean Oracles became a sacrosanct fossil for the wider world, when in 1989 Ruth Majercik appended to Des Places' text an English translation and commentary.[7] As I have argued elsewhere (Athanassiadi 1999: 158–9), instead of the nineteenth-century ideological edition that we have at the moment, we need one based on the criterion of provenance. Such a text would constitute a sounder and more objective basis on which to found any future research on the oracles.

Psellos and Plethon as Readers of the Oracles: Soteriological Concerns and Metaphysical Preoccupations

In comparing the two Byzantine collections of the Oracles, I propose to concentrate on Plethon's work. This emphasis is dictated by the need to redress the scholarly balance, as Psellos' recension and especially his several summaries on Chaldaean theology have been assiduously studied and, what is more, treated as an objective basis for the reconstruction of the Chaldaean system. This is the main reason for the confusion in modern scholarship regarding the theological content and the magical practices of the Chaldaean Oracles which, in view of the key position that they hold in Neoplatonism, constitute a text of primary importance for religious and philosophical studies. We must wake up to the fact that what Psellos offers is at best a subjective, and often careless, reading of one, not altogether 'orthodox', source—Proclus. Plethon's work on the other hand has only recently begun to be considered, thanks to the efforts first of Michel Tardieu, who has studied and edited the Arabic tradition of the Plethonian recension, and now of Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker, who has produced a critical edition of it with translation and commentary.[8] While I agree with their general outlook on Plethon's ideological background and with their perception of some of the differences between his approach and that of Psellos, I would like to dwell on certain points which may lead to the clarification of more general issues. Possibly the best way of initiating the comparison between Psellos and Plethon is to consider briefly the six oracles (Nos. 107, 149, 150, 159, 206, and 212) that the latter leaves out of his corpus.

[6] Cf. *Les Oracles chaldaïques* (Paris, 1971). For the new fragments, see M. Tardieu in Lewy (1978: 520–2) and Saffrey (1969).

[7] *The Chaldean Oracles* (Leiden, 1989).

[8] *Oracles Chaldaïques* (Athens, 1995).

No. 107,[9] the second longest oracle in our collection, condemns in naïve and rather prudish language the natural sciences or, in Psellos' words, *πᾶσαν ἑλληνικὴν σοφίαν* (*PG* 122. 1128C = 130. 1–2). Its simple, analytical diction contrasts sharply with the sophisticated and often deliberately obscure style of the other oracles, and to the expert eye of Plethon it must have appeared of Christian–Byzantine rather than ancient inspiration, not least through its profession of a radical form of cosmic pessimism, which exiled 'the plant of Truth' (*ἀληθείης φυτὸν*) from earth. As a fully fledged, if old-fashioned, Platonist and a typical Renaissance scholar, Plethon would have considered this as intellectually obscurantist and wrong on metaphysical grounds, and as such he excised it as a forgery.

No. 159,[10] which was hopelessly incomplete in the form in which Plethon discovered it in Psellos, seems to commend violent death by qualifying as 'most pure' the souls of those who suffered such a fate. This proposition flatly contradicts another Chaldaean oracle that Plethon includes in his collection (No. 166/17), while going totally against the grain of both Platonism and popular Greek ethics, in which the souls of *βιαιοθάνατοι* are deemed to haunt the world of the living. Plethon therefore seems to have excised the oracle for reasons of both form and content. Moreover Psellos' commentary, which Plethon had before his eyes, and which extols the teaching of the oracle by associating it with the Christian martyrs, doubtless added insult to injury.

Of special interest when assessing Plethon's methodology is the exclusion from the collection of No. 212.[11] Tardieu suggests that this was done for metrical reasons, the line being an iambic trimeter,[12] whereas the regular metre of oracular poetry, and especially of the Apollinian responses to theological questions in late antiquity, was the dactylic hexameter. If this is so, Plethon's decision to banish from his collection a saying which is so much in tune with the overall teaching of the Chaldaean Oracles tells

[9] The numbering of the Oracles follows the edn. of Des Places. When a second number occurs, it refers to the sequence in Plethon's collection, and therefore reproduces the numbers of the Tambrun-Krasker edn.

Μὴ τὰ πελώρια μέτρα γύης ὑπὸ σὴν φρένα βάλλου·
οὐ γὰρ ἀληθείης φυτὸν ἐν χθονί.....
Μηδὲ μέτρει μέτρον ἠελίου κανόνας συναθροίσας·
ἀιδίῳ βουλῇ φέρεται πατρός, οὐχ ἕνεκεν σοῦ.
Μήνης ῥοῖζον ἔασον· ἀεὶ τρέχει ἔργῳ ἀνάγκης.
Ἀστέριον προπόρευμα σέθεν χάριν οὐκ ἐλοχεύθη.
Αἴθριος ὀρνίθων ταρσὸς πλατὺς οὔποτ' ἀληθής,
οὐ θυσιῶν σπλάγχνων τε τομαί· τἄδ' ἀθύρματα πάντα,
ἐμπορικῆς ἀπάτης στηρίγματα. Φεῦγε σὺ ταῦτα,
μέλλων εὐσεβίης ἱερὸν παράδεισον ἀνοίγειν,
ἔνθ' ἀρετὴ σοφία τε καὶ εὐνομία συνάγονται.

[10] *...βίῃ ὅτι σῶμα λιπόντων*
ἀνθρώπων ψυχαὶ καθαρώταται../ψυχαὶ ἀρηΐφατοι καθαρώτεραι ἢ ἐπὶ νούσοις
(Arethas' version).

[11] "*Α δὴ λέγει νοῦς, τῷ νοεῖν δήπου λέγει.*

[12] Tardieu (1987: 153).

us something about his philological rigour, at least on this particular occasion.[13]

Finally Nos. 150, 206, and 149,[14] as well as being metrically incomplete, are straightforward magic injunctions which blatantly contradict Plethon's view of the Chaldaean revelation as a highly spiritual text. Yet Plethon does not excise from his corpus every single 'magical' oracle. As a clue towards elucidating his criterion of selection, I suggest that we consider one of those he does include, No. 147/24. The text provided by Psellos reads as follows:

Πολλάκις ἢν λέξῃς μοι, ἀθρήσεις πάντα λέοντα
Οὔτε γὰρ οὐράνιος κυρτὸς τότε φαίνεται ὄγκος,
ἀστέρες οὐ λάμπουσι, τὸ μήνης φῶς κεκάλυπται,
χθὼν οὐχ ἕστηκεν· βλέπεται δέ <τὰ> πάντα κεραυνοῖς.

Personally I detect here another Byzantine forgery, but clearly this is not how Plethon viewed the text. Admittedly he had major doubts as regards its state, but he solved them by resorting to drastic emendations, which incidentally create metrical problems.[15] Thus, in Plethon's reconstruction of the text, the oracle reads as follows:

Πολλάκις ἢν λέξῃς μοι, ἀθρήσεις πάντη λεκτὸν
Οὔτε γὰρ οὐράνιος κυρτὸς τότε φαίνεται ὄγκος,
ἀστέρες οὐ λάμπουσι, τὸ μήνης φῶς κεκάλυπται,
χθὼν οὐχ ἕστηκεν· βλέπεται δέ <τὰ> πάντα κεραυνοί.

Turning from the text to the commentaries on this oracle, we realize that, like his source Proclus, Psellos is engrossed by the technical aspect of the Oracles. One of his main concerns is the reconstruction of the magical ceremonies, which he assumes—clearly following Proclus—to have played a crucial role in the articulation of the system. Spells and magical instruments, astrological and alchemical material, are subjects which fascinate Psellos and he provides literal and often ingenious explanations for them. Conversely Plethon, who cannot possibly banish every reference to *τελεταί* without ending up with only a few lines of text, interprets all references to them and their paraphernalia as initiation into the mysteries of the mind and as symbols of the spiritual truth. Thus in the passage under discussion the key word

[13] It should be pointed out that, on one occasion at least (No. 147/24 discussed below), Plethon succeeds in conveying what he wants at the cost of violating the metre.

[14] *'Ονόματα βάρβαρα μήποτ' ἀλλάξῃς* (150)
'Ενέργει περὶ τὸν ἑκατικὸν στρόφαλον (206)
'Ηνίκα δ' ἐρχόμενον δαίμονα πρόσγειον ἀθρήσεις,
θῦε λίθον μνούζιριν ἐπαυδῶν (149).

[15] A sensible (and metrically possible) emendation—*πάντ' ἀχλύοντα*—was proposed by Lobeck. For a good discussion of the oracle in connection with Iamblichus and Psellos, see Johnston (1990: 111–33), who does not mention Plethon. A paraphrasis of oracle 147 is to be found in Iamblichus *de myst.* 2. 4, 75. 12–15; the Iamblichan meaning agrees with Plethon's and not Psellos' text and interpretation.

for Psellos is 'lion' which he identifies with the zodiac sign of Leo, while pointing out its well-known solar connections. If, he tells us, during the Chaldaean ceremonies one addresses the leonine source of the stars by its proper name, then one will witness precisely what the oracle describes. The reason for this lies in the fact that when the superior *hegemonikon* (governing part) of the leonine source manifests itself, its overwhelming power conceals the landscape of the heavens from our view, though it by no means eliminates its essence (*οὐκ ἀναιρεῖ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* (1133C = 134.14)). As opposed to this astrological-magical interpretation of the oracle, Plethon proposes a purely spiritual explanation of the divine words (*ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ λέγει τὸ λόγιον*): 'If you insistently address me or invoke me, says God to the initiate, then you will see everywhere what you have addressed, that is me whom you invoked. For nothing else will be visible to you but all things as lightning, that is the fire which leaps everywhere over the world.' As well as providing a topos of Sufi teaching, Plethon's exegesis justifies Chaldaean (and Zoroastrian) pyrolatry: to the believer who has advanced in mystical knowledge, and has not remained at the spiritually imperfect level of Semele, God manifests himself in his unadulterated form of divine fire. What is interesting in the present case is that, faced with the possibility of introducing a vital teaching of mystical theology, Plethon did not hesitate to break formal philological rules—*πάντῃ λεκτόν* does not scan. More importantly, however, by asserting that the highest principle may appear to man and be comprehended in its entirety by him, Plethon parts company not only with Psellos, but equally with the original interpreters of the Oracles, the Neoplatonists themselves, who postulated a negative theology placing the supreme God beyond vision and intellection.

To Plethon's mind however, games with divine apparitions, whether in their undisguised or symbolic form, were dangerous things. As if to emphasize this, he places immediately after the 'theophanic' oracle that we have just considered the austere injunction *Μὴ φύσεως καλέσῃς αὔτοπτον ἄγαλμα* (101/25), and warns his readers that the goddess Nature is not visible to human eyes; should she be ritually invoked, she will show to the initiate *some* only of the symbols of her status and not her true nature—in other words she will manifest what the Christian Psellos understands and personalizes as 'a multitude of demons'—*φυσικῶν δαιμονίων μόνον πληθύν* (1136D = 136. 13). Though the two exegetes seem to be saying the same, the crucial difference in their interpretation is again one of faithfulness to the Neoplatonist approach. Whether following Proclus or of his own accord, Psellos gives as the reason for the demonic apparition of Nature—and therefore the need to leave her uninvoked—the fact that she is not wholly intelligible (*οὐκ ἔστι παντάπασι νοητὸν*: 1136D = 136. 10). Plethon on the other hand concentrates on the verb *μὴ καλέσῃς*: the reason for his negative injunction is that the spiritual essence of Nature is simply not visible to the human eye.

Even more revealing for our purposes is the disparity displayed by the two commentators when they interpret No. 90/19.[16] For Psellos the dogs who spring out of the earth are *real*. They are the material demons (ἔνυλοι δαίμονες) who haunt the earth (1140C = 139. 1). Conversely, for Plethon they are illusory apparitions (φαινόμενα ἀνυπόστατα), amounting to no more than the phantoms of the initiate's irrational urges.[17]

From the human point of view the most important aspect of any holy book, or mystic way, is the soteriological. Viewing the collection as a way to salvation, Plethon displays great optimism. Oracles that could be classified as eschatological are considered by him in purely symbolic terms. Thus for the oracle Ψυχῆς ἐξωστῆρες ἀνάπνοοι εὔλυτοι εἰσίν (124/9) he gives as its hidden meaning the following: 'the reasoning which pushes away the soul, that is away from wickedness, and thus allows it to breathe, is easily set free, without difficulty released from the forgetfulness which held it prisoner'. Psellos' literal understanding of the same oracle, while revealing an uncommon preoccupation with death, also betrays a certain amount of wishful thinking: when death as a physical event approaches, the powers which push the soul outside the body are free, that is unconstrained by any natural force; indeed they are eminently able to liberate the soul from its bodily fetters (1144C = 142. 4 ff.).Typically Psellos views the oracle as referring to a primarily physical activity; Plethon on the other hand perceives death in this context as a moral and spiritual state, and consequently uses the oracle as a pretext for a discussion on the freedom of the will.

Another 'eschatological' oracle (162/8) drills an even greater abyss between the two commentators. Psellos' version, which reads as follows, Ἅ ἃ τούσδε χθὼν κατωρύεται ἐς τέκνα μέχρις is critically emended by Plethon to Ἅ ἃ τούσδε χθὼν κατοδύρεται ἐς τέκνα μέχρις. Psellos understands the apocalyptic utterance as a reference to the unbelievers (περὶ τῶν ἀθέων ὁ λόγος), those who deny God's existence. God extends his punishment to their posterity. 'The earth howls over them', that is, their subterranean abode bellows over them and the awful sound is like the roaring of a lion (1145B–C = 143. 13). Against this Christian hell, Plethon dynamically balances a picture of earthly failure: those who, while on earth, do not hasten towards the realm of light where their soul has originated, fail to accomplish their duty towards their own mortal nature (for this is how Plethon understands 'earth' in the present context), but equally they wrong their own children who share in their parents' wickedness by reason of their misguided upbringing.

[16] ἐκ δ' ἄρα κόλπων
γαίης θρῴσκουσι χθόνιοι κύνες οὔποτ' ἀληθὲς
σῆμα βροτῷ δεικνύντες.

[17] This again is an important point in Sufi teaching which can be driven home in quite dramatic terms: as one advances along the way, one acquires the ability to distance oneself from one's passions, which at times may leap out of oneself in the physical form of the animal whose characteristics are most appropriate to the conquered and thus alienated passion of the devotee.

The Platonic division of humanity into the educated and the uneducated (the πεπαιδευμένοι and the ἀπαίδευτοι) is always present in Plethon's mind. If on the ontological level evil equals non-existence, on the moral level its infinite shades and gradations appear to him as a greater or lesser deficiency in education. Thus, commenting on 161/21 (ποιναὶ μερόπων ἄγκτειραι (Psellos); αἱ ποιναὶ μερόπων ἄγκτειραι (Plethon)), the latter regards misfortune as an eminently educative force in a world in which nothing ever happens at random. An optimist by nature and upbringing, he allegorizes the punitive demons who seize hold of men as the inhibitions which turn man away from wickedness and attach him to the good. Commenting on the same oracular phrase Psellos had talked of the need of purification for all and had concluded with the pessimistic, but historically relevant, remark that 'indeed we see many of those who have lived in piety and purity fall into unexpected misfortunes' (1141A = 139. 25–6). Psellos' sense of the tragic and the absurd in history was certainly not shared by his successor. Indeed, as a commentator of the Chaldaean Oracles, Plethon displays an unexpected *joie de vivre*, when he deliberately turns the call to an ascetic life into an exhortation to a life of terrestrial well-being.[18]

Turning from ethics and eschatology to metaphysics, we discover that Plethon's understanding of the system which he extracts from the thirty-six oracles that he has retained from Psellos' recension, is austerely monistic; it is a vertical emanational construction which pointedly ignores the triadic structures of both Neoplatonist and Christian theology. Besides, as has already been pointed out, the fiery first principle, which pervades all its emanations, is not transcendental. Thus the famous Chaldaean line which concludes the oracle that heads Kroll's collection,

ὄφρα μάθῃς τὸ νοητόν, ἐπεὶ νόου ἔξω ὑπάρχει (1.10)

and which is to be found in Psellos in the metrically maimed form,

Μάθε τὸ νοητόν, ἐπεὶ νόου ἔξω ὑπάρχει,

appears in Plethon's corpus as follows:

Μάνθανε τὸ νοητόν, ἐπεὶ νόου ἔξω ὑπάρχει (29).

Psellos gives the line its classic apophatic interpretation, that the intelligible transcends intellection (1148D–1149A = 145). Plethon introduces a subtle division between the concepts of actuality and potentiality—ἐνεργείᾳ and δυνάμει. The intelligible, he postulates, has been planted in man; it is outside him ἐνεργείᾳ, not δυνάμει (ἔξω τοῦ σοῦ ὑπάρχει νοῦ ἐνεργείᾳ δηλαδή). It is therefore up to the individual man to activate the innate knowledge of the intelligible.

[18] See No. 158/16 and the equivalent commentaries by Psellos (1125 = 127–8) and Plethon for two diametrically opposed interpretations.

Even more optimistic (as requiring less energy on the part of man) is the monistic message dispensed by Plethon's interpretation of No. 88/20:

> *Ἡ φύσις πείθει πιστεύειν*[19] *εἶναι τοὺς δαίμονας ἀγνούς,*
> *καὶ τὰ κακῆς ὕλης βλαστήματα χρηστὰ καὶ ἐσθλά.*

While on this occasion the texts of Psellos and Plethon are virtually the same, their interpretations are typically antithetical. Psellos displays a much more literal and at the same time gloomier understanding of the text. Starting from a fundamentally dualistic conception of the universe, he stages choruses of evil demons who often *pretend* to be good in order to lead the initiate astray.[20] To this deliberately perverse behaviour on the part of the supernatural, Plethon opposes a profoundly reassuring view: everything for him, even the offspring of the so-called 'evil matter', is essentially good, a point that he argues in extreme Platonic terms when stating that the oracle refers to matter as being evil not in essence, but in view of its position as the very last entity in the order of existence;[21] in this context 'evil' is an emphatic way of speaking, an extreme expression to denote the minimal participation in the good enjoyed by matter. The ultimate message of the oracle according to Plethon is that, if the offspring of the so-called bad matter can be good as deriving from God who is *αὐτοαγαθός*, far more so are the demons who are both logical and immortal, two characteristics which ensure for them an exalted position in the ladder of being.

A final example of the contrasting preoccupations of the two exegetes concerns No. 79/34 (*Πᾶς ἴσχει κόσμος νοερούς ἀνοχῆας ἀκαμπεῖς* (Psellos); *Ὦ πῶς κόσμος ἔχει νοερούς ἀνοχῆας ἀκαμπεῖς* (Plethon)). Psellos approaches the oracle from a technical point of view and analyses it according to the complicated system of the Chaldaean cosmography that he finds in Proclus, using for this purpose abundant jargon (1132D = 133. 8 ff.). Plethon, on the other hand, who believes in the existence of one pre-eternal and indestructible world, emends the plurality of the worlds in the original (*πᾶς κόσμος* becomes simply *κόσμος*). Having established by philological means that we only have *one* world, Plethon then explains the oracle as referring to the emanating capacity of this one world, while interpreting the term *ἀκαμπεῖς* as an emphatic way of putting across its indestructibility (*ἄφθαρτον εἶναι*).[22]

[19] *πιστεύειν del.* Plethon.

[20] *καὶ πολυειδεῖς προφέρονται μορφαὶ δαιμονιώδεις... καὶ ἱλαραὶ καὶ χαρίεσσαι πολλάκις φαινόμεναι φαντασίαν τινὸς ἀγαθότητος πρὸς τὸν τελούμενον ὑποκρίνονται.* (1137 = 136. 18–22)

[21] *ὡς ἐσχάτην ἐν ταῖς οὐσίαις τεταγμένην καὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐπ' ἐλάχιστον μετέχουσαν, τὸ ἐλάχιστον αὐτῆς ἀγαθὸν τῷ κακῷ σημαῖνον.*

[22] This message is conveyed even more clearly by Plethon's definitive work on the *Laws*: in the chapter on the 'Eternity of the All' (2.27), he postulates that all species, whether eternal, immortal in time, or mortal, are integrated into one system.

Psellos as the Last of the Neoplatonists

Having looked at individual oracles and the way in which our two commentators analyse them, we may now pass to questions of a more general nature. What in particular drove each of them to the Chaldaean revelation and incited him to produce annotated recensions of it? What do these recensions tell us about their authors?

To begin with Psellos, we notice straightaway that his interest in the Oracles and in Proclus' commentary is unduly vivid for a pillar of the Byzantine establishment. Intellectual—and even spiritual—curiosity is certainly to be detected at the root of his choice, but, to judge from his commentary, which nowhere deviates substantially from Christian orthodoxies, one comes to the conclusion that, if Psellos originally approached the collection in a spirit of unprejudiced enquiry, this must soon have given way to a desire to find in the work confirmation from pagan quarters of the theological and moral infallability of his own faith. Thus Psellos often twists the meaning of the text to meet the dogmatic requirements of Christianity, as for example when he equates the invariably female second principle of the Chaldaean triad—the dynamis—with the Son (1144A–B = 141. 15 ff.); at other times he cannot withhold his joy at the discovery of points of undeniable agreement between the two creeds, as is clear from enthusiastic interjections of the type: *Ἡμέτερον καὶ ἀληθὲς τὸ δόγμα!* (1145A = 142. 21). However, a closer—and less charitable—examination of the evidence might reveal a hypocritical compliance with the tenets of Christianity on the part of the commentator out of fear. In one instance he describes in great detail—and with obvious relish—a magical instrument, the *strofalos* of Hecate, only to end with the following pietist remark: 'all this is nonsense' (1133B = 134. 2). Another time he lapses into pure apology: 'for my part I do not accept the ceremonies of the Chaldaeans nor do I adhere to their doctrines. All I am doing is offering you some hints of the abstruseness of the system' (1132C = 133. 4–6). Not *περιεργασία* but *φιλομάθεια* is his guiding principle as he approaches the Chaldaean revelation.[23]

When it comes to magical practices Psellos is wholly engrossed by his material and is eager to turn the slightest hint into a theory with multiple adaptations. Whether in this task he was guided by Proclus we cannot know. What is certain, however, is that the sheer amount of space that he devotes to the magical aspect of the Oracles betrays a considerable bias in this direction. Another area which fascinates Psellos is the systematic.[24] Though he makes no effort to arrange by subject-matter the oracles that he selects from Proclus' corpus, his interest in classification is obvious. Accordingly his various attempts at a reproduction of the essentials of the system for the sake of a

[23] Cf. *Philosophica minora I*, ed. J. M. Duffy, op. 32, 100–1.

[24] See in this regard the meticulous analysis of oracle 158 (1124 = 126–7).

diverse audience are characterized by excessive attention to the logic of the structure, and true delight in the understanding and reproduction of technical jargon.

On the evidence of the commentary, Psellos' Christianity can be said to be of the gloomy variety, his view of the human condition being uncompromisingly pessimistic: his demons are real punitive forces of an avenging God. Thus to the Chaldaean statement that 'the Father does not inspirit fear but infuses persuasion' (14), Psellos retorts that this is only partially true of the Christian God who is both light and fire, consuming the wicked (1144A = 141. 8 ff.).[25] Psellos' playing down of the emanational element in the articulation of the cosmos is also an expression of his pessimism. For him this universe does not hang together according to a mathematical model, and our earth is a tragic place from which providence and grace are often absent, and where packs of demons range freely in a world in which matter is viewed in unambiguously dark colours.

Plethon and the New Spirit

Between Psellos' and Plethon's time the corpus of the Chaldaean Oracles together with Proclus' considerable commentary was lost.[26] What Plethon found was Psellos' recension with its rather garrulous commentary punctuated by the landmarks of Christian theology and by a vivid interest in magic. Plethon proceeded to edit the text massively, and even more importantly to reorganize the fragments according to the requirements of a system, and to substitute in the title the adjective 'Magian' for 'Chaldaean'.

The precise title of the Plethonian recension is *Μαγικὰ λόγια τῶν ἀπὸ Ζωροάστρου μάγων—Magian Oracles of the Magi Pupils of Zoroaster.* Before proceeding to enquire about the Persian connection, it is worth giving a brief summary of Plethon's carreer. George Gemistos assumed the name Plethon with its obvious associations in 1439 when, at the age of about 80, he travelled to Florence as a participant in the ill-fated Council of Union. On the margin of his eristic activities as a committee member, Plethon delivered a series of lectures on Plato which made a certain impact, influencing the artistic repertory of the Italian Renaissance as much as the directions of classical scholarship. Even more relevantly to our theme, he is reported as having said at the Council that within a few years neither Christianity nor Islam, but a new form of paganism, would be a universal religion.[27]

[25] For a different view, Plethon No. 36 with commentary.

[26] For the extraordinary length of the commentary, see. Marinus, *V. Procl.* 26.

[27] George of Trebizond reports the following: 'audivi ego ipsum Florentiae... asserentem unam eandemque religionem uno animo, una mente, una praedicatione universum orbem paucis post annis esse suscepturum. Cumque rogassem Christine an Machumeti? Neutram, inquit, sed non a gentilitate differentem', in Legrand (1903: No. 256, p. 287).

Back in the Peloponnese Plethon spent the rest of his long life defining this paganism. In what survives of his magnum opus, the *Laws* (which incidentally was burnt immediately after his death by the first Ottoman Patriarch of Constantinople, George Gennadios Scholarios), Plethon sets out the principles of a social and religious reform based on a monotheism more perfect, as he postulates, than the laws of Christianity and Islam, since its prophet—Zoroaster—is older and wiser than both Jesus and Muhammad. For Plethon Zoroaster is 'the most remarkable exegete of all divine and otherwise good things',[28] his *ἡγεμὼν τῶν λόγων*, that is the guide who inspires, reveals and initiates in the mysteries of the beyond. As Plethon's mentor, Zoroaster is followed by a score of mythical and historical figures, the most important among whom are Pythagoras, Plato and their successors (*Legg.* 1. 1. 32). In his *Reply to Scholarios' views on Aristotle*, Plethon is more specific about his spiritual genealogy, pointing out that Plato's philosophy is based on the Pythagorean tradition, but also stating that Pythagoras acquired his wisdom through contact with the Zoroastrian Magi at whose feet he sat in Asia Minor; 'that this was the philosophy espoused by Plato is proven by the still extant oracles of Zoroaster's disciples, which agree on all accounts (*πάντῃ καὶ πάντως*) with Plato's doctrines'.[29] Thus, without having recourse to the Neoplatonists, Plethon reproduces their fundamental doctrine of the dependence of Plato on Pythagoras, while adding another dimension, that of Zoroastrianism. What may be the background of this fantastic theory?

In a letter to Theodora Palaeologina, Gennadios Scholarios offers the following information on Plethon's spiritual grounding:

> the sum total of his apostasy was consummated by a certain Jew with whom he studied because he was an expert on Aristotle. He was a follower of Averroes and of the other Arab and Persian commentators of Aristotle's works, which have been translated by the Jews into their own language. He is also the man who acquainted him with Zoroaster and the rest. With this man, who was ostensibly a Jew but in reality a Hellene, he stayed for a long time not only as his pupil but also in his service being supported by him. He was one of the most influential men at the Court of these barbarians; his name was Elissaeus.[30]

In another letter to the Exarch of the Peloponnese Joseph, who had after Plethon's death sent Gennadios the *Book of Laws*, the patriarch addresses the dead apostate in the following terms: 'How could you deliver yourself to Zoroaster?... You were introduced to him, about whom you knew nothing before, by the polytheist Elissaeus who pretended to be a Jew, and was at the time a man of great influence at the Court of the barbarians. You fled your

[28] *Legg.* 1. 1. 30, and for what follows in the text.

[29] *Contra Scholarii pro Aristotele objectiones*, ed. E.V. Maltese (Leipzig, 1988), 5. 4. Plethon has also left a short theogony in prose *Ζωροαστρείων τε καὶ Πλατωνικῶν δογμάτων συγκεφαλαίωσις*, ed. C. Alexander, in *Traité des Lois* (Paris, 1858), 262–9.

[30] George Scholarios Gennadios, *Œuvres complètes*, iv, ed. L. Petit, M. Jugie, and X. A. Sideridès (Paris, 1935), 152; Bidez and Cumont (1938: O 115, II 260).

country and lived with him in order to absorb his wonderful teaching.' Gennadios' information is corroborated by Plethon's laconic statement: 'I have learned about Averroes from the greatest Italian sages and from the Jews'.[31] How are we to interpret this evidence?

A combined reading of the times and the personal circumstances of George Gemistos would yield something like the following. Born around 1360 in Constantinople to a well-to-do and influential family, George had the benefit of an excellent education. His tutor, Demetrios Kydones, was a pupil of the Hesychast Nicholas Kabasilas and the translator of Thomas Aquinas, but also a well-travelled man who understood in depth both East and West, both theology and politics. Gemistos was thus aware of an esoteric tradition in East and West when as a young man he set out for Adrianople where the Ottoman Court had been established since the 1360s. What led him there was clearly the reputation of a wise man, expert in the Arab commentators and also versed in mystical wisdom; his learning need not however have been specifically Kabbalistic, an assumption generally advanced by historians because Elissaeus was a Jew. Things were (and are) much more vague than that, and the mystical syncretism of the various spiritual masters who were influential for a time at a Seljuk or an Ottoman Court could be compounded of the most extraordinary (or even contradictory) ingredients from East and West, from scholastic and popular quarters alike. Elissaeus—a mysterious figure who seems to have been burnt at the stake—appears to have accepted George as his *mürid*, that is as a pupil who had to live with him and serve him on a daily basis, thus slowly progressing along the stations of the spiritual way not least through the virtue of obedience. His teaching would have been heterodox by the standards of any official dogma, since it was an eclectic synthesis borrowing elements and figures from all traditions and reorganizing them according to his own judgement. And Plethon's marked indifference to the ritual aspect of the Chaldaean Oracles may owe something to his master's unconventional attitude towards religious practice. However this may be, Scholarios' information that Elissaeus was eventually burnt alive would tally with the overall picture: spiritual masters who proved too original were condemned by the Islamic establishment to exemplary deaths. Such was indeed the fate of Shihâboddîn Yahyâ Sohrawardî (1155–91), the Iranian mystic, whose influence Henry Corbin detects behind Plethon's theories.

Sohrawardî was an Azerbaidjani, that is a native of the Zoroastrian holy land of Atropatene. His conviction that in Iran the sacred tradition had suffered no break with the coming of Islam led him to regard Zarathustra as the original prophet. Even more interestingly, he turned to Plato, whose Ideas he interpreted for the purposes of his theosophical system in terms of Zoroastrian angelology. An elaborate hierarchy of worlds, intelligences, and corresponding angels unites the one and only God of the Islamic faith with

[31] Masai (1956: 60 n. 2).

man who may, thanks to this cosmic and at the same time gnosiological and salvational ladder, ascend and reach the ultimate cause of being. And it is this very 'ladder', this intermediate angelic realm which extends between the Intelligible and the Sensible, between the face of God (to use Islamic vocabulary) and the face of Man, that is the domain of Revelation.

Sohrawardî's sanctioning of the prehistory, as it were, of Iranian religion together with his Platonist leanings may have qualified him for a martyr's death, but at the same time they earned him a rich intellectual progeny, the so-called Platonists of Persia (known as the Ishrâqîyûn), to the study and propagation of whose teaching Henry Corbin devoted his life. Unlike Corbin, I do not believe in a direct influence of Sohrawardî on Plethon, though an indirect knowledge of his writings through oral channels seems to me very probable. Sohrawardî's renown was vast and Elissaeus sounds exactly the type of man to be fascinated by the synthesis of Zarathustra and Plato attempted by the Iranian scholar. Such a man would then serve up to his audience his own brand of the way to salvation—possibly without any reference to his source. Plethon's emphasis on the importance of orality—ἀπὸ φωνῆς—in any theological teaching, 'so that the disciples become wiser in their soul rather than keeping their science in books' (*Contra Schol.* 5. 2) is a characteristic feature of all mystical traditions. Being syncretistic by nature as well as averse to the practice of footnoting and, above all, secretive, distinguishing between an inner (*bâtin*) and an outer (*zahir*) meaning in everything, such traditions make it very difficult for outsiders—and even for insiders—to follow up their intellectual lineage.

Back home from the Court of the Barbarians, Plethon eventually came across Psellos' recension of the Chaldaean Oracles and, remembering not only the words of Elissaeus but also the tradition which attributed Oracles to Zoroaster,[32] he recognized in the hexameters the sage's revelation to mankind *as transmitted by his pupils*. The short concise commentary that he dedicated to the sacred book that would replace the Bible and the Koran, propagates a theology of light which proceeds in strict verticality, and an angelology whose function is soteriological. This scheme contradicts and exposes both the Trinitarian structures of the Christians and the inaccessible unicity of the Koranic God. A strong didactic streak permeates the Plethonian corpus, which systematically ascends from the subjective to the objective—from a psychic to a cosmic level. Once the principles of how the descended soul can embark on its journey of return have been established, the ontological structure of the universe is revealed to the initiate. The gnosis imparted by the Magian revelation is at once theoretical and theophanic-salvational, its purpose being initiatory and ultimately redemptive.

[32] Nicholas of Damascus, IIA. 90 fr. 68, 372 (Jacoby). According to Bidez and Cumont (1938: i. 99), the *Ζωροάστρου λόγια*, which are mentioned by Nicholas of Damascus alongside the *Σιβύλλης χρησμοί*, are likely to have been composed in Greek at the beginning of our era; cf. Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 16: *'Αποκαλύψεις . . . Ζωροάστρου.*

From Iamblichus onwards the Chaldaean Oracles served the Neoplatonists as the holy book *par excellence*, a text more sacred even than the Orphic and the Platonic writings, and as such it was assiduously commented on by each successive generation of believers. Like them, Psellos viewed the hexameters as a treasure-house of spiritual truths, the holy book of a community into which he would integrate himself at least philosophically if not theologically, as a scholar rather than a fully fledged adept. Indeed the distinction between the two is tenuous, as witnessed by the embarassed tone that often underlies Psellos' statements. But the sincerity of his allegiance should not be called into doubt: the spirit in which he approaches the Oracles as revealed through his commentary testifies to no substantial break with the Neoplatonic tradition and it would not be an exaggeration to say that his task as an exegete is in no way different from that of his late antique predecessors who in their attempt to create a religious oecumenism interpreted all theogonies and theologies whether Greek or Oriental in the light of the *Platonic Theology*. Likewise and with similar intentions Psellos viewed the Chaldaean Oracles *sub specie Christianitatis*. In scholastic, if not in essential terms, he is the *direct* descendant of the Neoplatonists.

Plethon on the other hand belongs to a totally different world, a world governed by the spirit of cosmopolitanism in social and especially cultural terms. The oral tradition of an Oriental mysticism—not necessarily narrowly Islamic—which had flourished since the ninth century in the greater Middle East and which had been abundantly fertilized by Neoplatonism, was a primary influence on him and an influence that he succeeded in amalgamating with what one might call for reasons of practical convenience the Florentine Neopaganism. As a commentator on the Oracles, Plethon is the *indirect* heir of the Neoplatonists, the man who appropriated their most sacred text not simply in order to reinterpret it within its own context, but so that he might use it as the companion of a new spiritual way.

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252

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XV

Ascent to Heroic or Divine Status in Late Antiquity: Continuities and Transformations *

The veneration of saints is a salient feature of late antique piety. This was only to be expected at a time when the ever-widening gulf between Man and a transcendent God had to be filled by heroic and divine intermediaries. Ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, the men who during their passage on earth had impressed humanity with acts of physical or moral heroism were honoured by their posterity with a cult whose form, function and emphasis necessarily changed with the passage of time. Christianity above all, at once imitating and transforming received attitudes towards what constituted heroism, had enriched the traditional pattern of hero worship with a new cult – that of the martyrs. Indeed the link between this new type of hero worship and older forms of the same phenomenon was explicitly made by Bishop Pegasius of Ilion in A.D. 354: as he guided the future Emperor Julian around the antiquities of Troy the bishop ventured a comparison between the cult of Hector and Achilles on the one hand and that of the Christian martyrs on the other.[1]

Combining this text with epigraphic and other literary evidence, D.D. Hughes argues that late antique citizen bodies and other social groups continued to worship their national heroes as a means of legitimising territorial claims or bolstering their received religious traditions against the rising tide of a new universal faith.[2] It is along the lines of the latter hypothesis that I would interpret the growing popularity of Achilles in late antiquity. Indicative of this is the considerable number of dishes, domestic utensils and private objects in marble, silver, bronze, terracotta and other materials which present scenes from the hero's life cycle[3] or refer to specific events in his career.[4] To these can now be added a superb series of ivory plaques with an

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* Originally published in *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* (*Thesca*), vol. 2, Los Angeles 2004, 212–14.

[1] Julian, ep. 79 (Bidez).

[2] "Hero cult, heroic honors, heroic dead: some developments in the Hellenistic and Roman periods", in R. Hägg, *Ancient Greek Hero Cult*, Stockholm 1999, 167–75.

[3] For some striking examples, cf. *LIMC* I 'Achilleus' 2*, 10*, 46*, 66*, 166*, 580*, 640*; G.A.S. Snyder, "The so-called puteal in the Capitoline Museum at Rome", *JRS* 13 (1923), 56–68, pl. 1; D. Stutzinger, "Die spätantiken Achilleusdarstellungen – Versuch einer Deutung", in *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, exh.cat., Frankfurt 1983, 175–9.

[4] Cf. *LIMC* I 'Achilleus' 4*, 11*, 47*, 63*, 68*, 80*, 81*, 92*, 94*, 102*, 172*, Silver plate, Augst, Römermus. 62, 1; V. von Gonzenbach, "Achillesplatte", in H.A. Cahn, A. Kaufmann-Heinimann (eds), *Die spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst*, Derendingen 1984, 225–315, pls 146–78.

Achilles life-cycle from the 360s, discovered in 2002 in Eleutherna (Crete) by Petros Themelis.[5] Not merely a symbol of sanctity, but an active benefactor of humanity through his miracles, Achilles acquired a privileged position at the epicentre of Neoplatonic piety. In A.D. 375 the Eleusinian hierophant Nestorius received instructions in a dream that the city of Athens should offer Achilles public honours, and after his failure to persuade the authorities to do so, he fashioned a miniature temple with a statue of the hero and placed it at the feet of the cult statue of Athena at the Parthenon. Subsequently Nestorius performed the traditional rites – τελῶν δὲ τῇ θεῷ τὰ συνήθη κατὰ ταὐτὸν καὶ τῷ ἥρωι τὰ ἐγνωσμένα οἱ κατὰ θεσμὸν ἔπραττε – and thereby saved Attica from the effects of an earthquake. This important event was duly celebrated by the Neoplatonic diadochus Syrianus in the now lost hymn he composed in honour of Achilles.[6] Of all the Homeric heroes it was the two central figures of the epic, Achilles and Odysseus, who were re-interpreted as holy figures struggling through life's tribulations to achieve spiritual perfection, and worshipped as such within the framework of monotheistic paganism.[7]

New trends

It is important to stress at this point that the extent, quality and emphasis of late antique hero worship were not solely the products of reaction. Over the centuries, paganism evolved under its own momentum, promoting some and neglecting other areas of its own cultic ideology and practice. Thus the cult of the sage, which ever since Pythagoras had formed a recognised area of hero worship in Greek societies, spread in all directions and widened the circle of its devotees. Gradually sanctity through culture became the goal of an ever-increasing number of men and women who hoped to achieve immortality at the end of a life dedicated to the Muses, as innumerable funerary scenes and epigrams proclaim.[8] At the moment of death, the sage exchanges terrestrial life for astral immortality.[9]

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[5] A. Drandaki, D. Papanicola-Bakirtzi, A. Tourta (eds), *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek collections*, exh..cat,, Athens 2013, 68–9, No 15; cf. the contemporary mosaic floor with the same theme from Nea Paphos: *LIMC* I 'Achilleus' 3*, and K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, exh. cat, N. York 1979 , 237–8, No 213..

[6] Zosimus, IV 18.

[7] For the sanctification of Odysseus in the Neoplatonic tradition, see Porphyry, *De antro nymph.* 34, together with the allegorical representation from the 'House of Dionysos and Ulysses' at Dougga: K. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage*, Oxford 1978, 147–8, pl. VIII, 15; and cf. the bronze miniature ship with Odysseus bound to the mast: K. Weitzmann (above, n. 5), 222-3, No 199, and A. Kaldellis, "The Christianization of the past", in Drandaki *et al.* (above, n. 5), 44–7.

[8] See P. Boyancé, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs*, Paris 1937 ; H.-I. Marrou, *Μουσικὸς ἀνήρ: Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains*, 1964² ; P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, transl. A. Shapiro, Berkeley 1995, 267–331.

[9] *CIL* XI 2839, 6: *occubat in terris sapiens sed vivit in astris*; cf. Themistius *or.* 20, 234cd; 239d–240b.

As well as extending its ground spatially, the cult of the sage gained in depth and intensity in the post-classical era. An area in which this development can be studied in full is the cult of Plato. Like all other philosophical schools, the Academy was a religious institution – a *thiasos* –, and one of its functions was to pay divine honours to its founder. By the third century A.D. the traditional rites at Plato's tomb were performed not only in Athens[10] but also in Rome, where at Plotinus' school the official birthdays of Socrates and Plato were celebrated with sacrifices, festive dinners and orations specially composed for the occasion.[11] The "Platoneia" was an all-important ceremony which gave the members of the *thiasos* the opportunity to express their religious fervour in verse and to put forward new interpretations of the Platonic doctrine.[12] This tradition continued uninterrupted well into the fourth century, as Libanius – a rhetor and not a philosopher – testifies.[13] In the fifth century, Proclus still "celebrated year by year the festivals of Socrates and Plato". While doing so,

> it seemed that he spoke under divine inspiration..., for his eyes were filled with a sort of brilliance and the rest of his face shared in divine illumination. And once, in the course of his exposition, a man called Rufinus, a truthful person..., saw a light playing round his head. When he finished his exposition, Rufinus stood up and prostrated himself before Proclus.[14]

The divine Plato had acquired the power to bestow divinity on others!

This is indeed the most crucial and the most original aspect that late antiquity contributed to hero worship: sanctification through the study of the Platonic theology and the spreading of the holy word. According to a story reported by Psellus, when Julian the Theurgist was about to be born, his father performed the appropriate rites for his son to obtain an archangelic soul which he subsequently put into contact with that of Plato: the result of this metaphysical rendezvous was the book of revelation known as the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which served the Neoplatonists as holy scripture.[15] Equally, it was through his exegesis of Plato that Plotinus reached sainthood: at the moment of his death, Agathos Daimon emerged from under the philosopher's bed in the form of a snake and left the room, thus indicating that the divine in him was on its way to join "Plato, Pythagoras and all who make up the chorus of immortal love.[16] And to Amelius, the student who enquired of Apollo where the soul of his master had gone, the god responded with a lengthy hymn

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[10] Pausanias I 30, 2–3; Diogenes Laertius 3, 2.

[11] Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 2, 40–44.

[12] Ibid., 2.15.

[13] *Or.* 18, 306.

[14] Marinus, *V. Procl.*, 23, 17–29.

[15] Psellus, *On the Golden Chain*, opusc. 46, 44–51, in *Philosophica Minora* I (ed. J.M. Duffy).

[16] Porphyry, *V.Plot.* 2, 23–9 for the death scene; *ibid.* 23, 36–7 for the quotation.

which proclaimed to the world Plotinus' heroisation.[17] "Once a man, but now a demon", the blessed Plotinus had acquired divine status, and Apollo and the Muses now honoured him in song and dance.[18]

Writing at the end of the fourth century, Eunapius reports that the altars of Plotinus were still warm,[19] an expression that need not be taken metaphorically at a time when men paid divine honours to those who had dedicated their lives to a spiritual cause. Such was indeed the case of Peregrinus, the cynic philosopher who cremated himself at Olympia in A.D. 165 as a protest against the materialistic spirit of the times. The rationalist Lucian, who knew better than any of his contemporaries the mood of the age, expressed the fear that Peregrinus' disciples would found an oracle on the site of the pyre, that altars and golden statues would be erected in his memory, and that people would claim that they had been cured of fevers by the benign demon into whom the philosopher had now been transfigured.[20] Indeed, hours after the event, Lucian encountered a grey-haired man who assured him that he had just seen Peregrinus in the Seven Echo Portico walking about in a white garment, radiating light![21]

How widespread the Peregrinus cult became – if in fact it was ever established – we do not know, but Lucian's text is an eloquent comment on Antonine attitudes to heroisation by culture. In the 210s the court hagiographer Philostratus was asked by Julia Domna to produce a biography of the first-century Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius, whose shrine at Tyana was the recipient of the divine honours of apotheosis.[22] For Eunapius, writing some two hundred years after Philostratus, Apollonius was no mere philosopher, but "something between the divine and the human"; his life on earth was nothing less than a divine epiphany, while even his worshippers had a share in his divinity.[23]

It is in this context that we should place the cult of the Emperor Julian, whose reign marked for certain circles the beginning of a new era.[24] Believed to have performed miracles during his lifetime, Julian was worshipped as σύνναος θεὸς after his death, and according to Libanius "many cities have set up his statue in the

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[17] R. Goulet, "L'oracle d'Apollon dans la *Vie de Plotin*", in L. Brisson *et al.*, *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin*, I, Paris 1982, 371–412 ; *id.*, "Sur quelques interprétations récentes de l'oracle d'Apollon", *ibid.* II, Paris1992, 603–17, for the theory that the oracle was obtained at Apamea by theurgic means.

[18] Porphyry, *V.Plot.*, 22, 23–4.

[19] *V. Soph.* III 1, 3 (Giangrande).

[20] Lucian, *Peregrinus* 27–8.

[21] *Ibid.* 40.

[22] Philostratus, *V. Apollonii* 8, 31: καὶ ἱερὰ Τυανάδε βασιλείοις ἐκπεποιημένα τέλεσιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ βασιλεῖς ἀπηξίουν αὐτὸν ὧν αὐτοὶ ἠξιοῦντο. For Caracalla honouring Apollonius, Cassius Dio 78, 18, 4; for a statue of Apollonius in Alexander Severus' private lararium, Historia Augusta, *Alex.* 29, 2.

[23] *V. Soph.* II.1, 3–4 and XXIII 1, 8.

[24] For the Platonic diadochus Marinus, his predecessor, Proclus, "died in the year one-hundred and twenty-four from Julian's reign": *V. Procli* 36, 1–2.

temples of the gods and honour him as they do the gods", while those who address prayers to him have their wishes fulfilled.[25] As A.D. Nock remarked in an important article: "Julian has a halo – but it is a halo of personality not of position".[26] In other words his deification should be seen as hero cult rather than as imperial apotheosis, and this is exactly what Libanius anticipated when in addressing the dead emperor he wrote: "the day will come when men will sacrifice to you and erect altars and address prayers to you, just as to Heracles".[27]

To the mind of his successors, Julian was a Neoplatonic saint rather than a deified Roman emperor, his worship displaying the characteristics of the hero cult of the sage rather than those of the imperial apotheosis, which it subsumes. Indeed to the extent that Julian was worshipped as *divus* it was in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, as "the common hierophant of the entire world", a function performed by all late Neoplatonists.[28] Two striking examples of this concerning the philosopher priests Asclepiades and Heraiscus come from late antique Egypt, where belief in the deification of the sage had absorbed elements of the traditional religion. As Asclepiades laid his dead brother Heraiscus to rest

> mystic signs bathed in light appeared everywhere on the sheets, and around them divine visions which clearly revealed the gods with whom his soul now shared its abode.[29]

And in a legal document from the late fifth century, the son of Asclepiades, Horapollo, refers to his dead father as an ἥρως.[30]

Finally, one should mention the imaginary symbolism used by the Neoplatonists within the framework of their hero cult. The all-encompassing metaphysical world into which they integrated their sage is visually rendered with the aid of two geometrical shapes – the circle and the straight line. Thus the Homeric golden chain becomes the Πλάτωνος χρυσῆ σειρά, a dynastic line of succession stretching back to Plato, while the image of the circle, transformed into that of a divine chorus –an ἀκήρατος χορὸς– conveys the notions of harmony and purity bequeathed to the world by the sage.[31]

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[25] Libanius *or.* 18, 304; *ibid.* 177 for Julian's miracles.

[26] A.D. Nock, "Deifications and Julian", *JRS* 47 (1957), 122.

[27] *Or.* 15, 36.

[28] For the quotation, referring to Proclus, see Marinus, *V.Procli.* 19, 29–30.

[29] Damascius, *Hist, Phil.* fr. 76E (Athanassiadi).

[30] See J. Maspero, "Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien", *BIFAO* 11 (1914), 167.

[31] Damascius, *Hist, Phil.* fr. 98E and fr. 152 (Athanassiadi) respectively; and Libanius, *or.* 52, 21, for ὁ τῶν φιλοσόφων ἐξ Ἀπαμείας χορός, ὧν ὁ κορυφαῖος θεοῖς ἐώκει with reference to Iamblichus and his circle.

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XVI

THE DIVINE MAN OF LATE HELLENISM: A SOCIABLE AND POPULAR FIGURE

I. The θεῖος ἀνήρ

1. *Social reality or scholarly construct?*

The first question that springs to mind when confronted with the theme of this volume is a methodological one: is the term θεῖος ἀνήρ a recent coinage — a modern convention, like, say, "Neoplatonism" — or is it contemporary with the society we are studying[1]? Even a quick glance at the evidence reveals that the formula is ancient and, what is more, of regular usage in late antique society. It was an expression to which people had recourse in order to describe a familiar type, a figure who played a role in their lives both as an ideal and a reality. And if we were to compare it with the term "Second Sophistic", which is a methodological construct invented by a chronicler to legitimise a social trend by transforming it into a consistent intellectual movement, we would immediately see how much more weight it carried in contemporary society; for, unlike the "Second Sophistic", an expression that would have meant nothing to people outside Philostratus' own narrow circle, the term θεῖος ἀνήρ corresponds to a concept created and nurtured to meet the needs of an entire society. Whichever way one approaches the subject therefore, it is not possible to deconstruct it along the lines dictated by the "methodologies of suspicion"; the notion and reality of the θεῖος ἀνήρ is firmly embedded in the society of late antiquity.

In what follows I will not attempt to talk about origins — not because it is not fashionable to do so, but because it is totally unnecessary in the present context.

[1] In this connection one thinks of the classic work by L. Bieler, *Θεῖος ἀνήρ: Das Bild des "göttlichen Menschen" in Spätantike und Frühchristentum*, Vienna 1935–1936.

Instead I will remind the reader that, from at least the second century A.D., the concept of the θεῖος ἀνήρ was so widespread in the Mediterranean world as to inspire parodies in wide circulation both in real life and in literature. If we choose to stay only within the boundaries of the world of Lucian, we will meet a genuine holy man — Demonax — together with his anti-types: Peregrinus and Alexander of Abonoteichos. Parenthetically, and in anticipation of the main argument of this paper, one may remark that, whereas Peregrinus — and especially Alexander — comply with the model of the holy man which would be all the rage in late antiquity, Demonax represents not so much an old-fashioned ideal as a perennial type of philosophical life, thus illustrating Lucian's attachment to classical standards. Yet despite his studied indifference to what counted as modernity in his world, the thematic of the θεῖος ἀνήρ proved inescapable even for as reactionary a character as Lucian.

The need for a human model of goodness in this society (but also for a guarantee of eternal life) is so imperative that historical figures of the recent or distant past, such as Apollonius of Tyana or Pythagoras, are reworked until they are made to comply with a contemporary standard of sanctity capable of bestowing salvation. In turn, this model imposes a social ideal, yet an ideal which varies according to place, time and milieu and above all according to the temperament of the person who embodies (or propagates) it. A living and therefore evolving type against an exceptionally unstable social background, the θεῖος ἀνήρ is a dynamic and elusive figure, yet with all his fluidity, he has certain stable characteristics, and it is one of these — that of the social reformer through teaching — that I have chosen as the theme of this paper. The individual figures may vary greatly — Plotinus and Iamblichus, two archetypal divine men, can easily form the subject of a study in antithesis, as do Sosipatra and Hypatia, who incarnate, each in her own distinctive way, the ideal of the late antique holy woman. Yet what all four of these figures have in common is the vocation of imparting their thought-world to the circle of men and women who had gathered around them. Indeed it would not be far off the mark to say that they saw the reform of society as a crucial part of their mission.

2. *The universal paidagogos*

The divine men and women of late antiquity were not solitary figures, eremitic creatures who sought the salvation of their soul away from the hubbub of the city, as did their Christian counterparts[2]. The few exceptions to this rule among pagan holy men only confirm it. Eunapius, for example, has to justify the behaviour of Antoninus by reference to the harshness of the times, and Damascius presents the

[2] According to the strong language of the Emperor Julian in a letter addressed to a prominent member of his clergy which sets out the principles of a pastoral social policy (*Ep.* 89b, 288b Bidez, cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a 3ff., a well known passage to which Julian refers directly), it is out of an unnatural hatred for their fellow men inspired by evil demons that the hermits renounce human society when man is by nature a social and civilised being.

solitary sage Sarapio as an eccentric at odds with the world around him[3]. The struggle of the sage against the demons of the flesh and "irreligion" at large takes place in the midst of concentric circles of fellow human beings and the energy which is unleashed by this combat radiates far and wide. Thus, as Iamblichus is quick to point out to Porphyry, when the theurgist hastens towards his divine goal, this is not simply an act of personal exertion or renouncement and fulfillment, it is not a self-centred act, but one whose benefits are for everyone to reap[4]. Moulded on the type of the Iamblichan theurgist, the priests of the Julianic reform are, in theory at least, the benefactors of mankind[5].

The divine man has no personal interests separate from those of the community. He has no privacy. A well known anecdote from the life of Iamblichus offers an excellent illustration of this point. Resentful of the time he spent away from them, the pupils of Iamblichus chose the most eloquent among them to address the master.

> "Oh most divine teacher", said the pupil, "why do you spend time by yourself rather than share with us your most perfect wisdom? Your slaves have let us know that when you pray to the gods you appear to soar above the earth more than ten cubits, while your body and your garments take on a splendid golden hue; and when you finish your prayer your body becomes as it was before and you come down to earth to associate with us".

Though not at all inclined to laughter, Eunapius comments, Iamblichus laughed at these words. And, while he assured his pupils that the report of the slaves was far from the truth, he promised them from that moment onwards to do nothing away from their presence[6].

This is an extreme, but not untypical, illustration of the way in which the divine men of late antiquity conceived their pedagogic task. They were above all teachers whose primary mission was to form, by example and instruction, the character not only of those socially privileged men and women who came to them as pupils, but of humanity at large. The formal successor of Iamblichus, Aedesius of Cappadocia, was to be remembered as an exceptionally affable man who made a point of associating with vegetable sellers, weavers, smiths and carpenters in the marketplace of Pergamon. In behaving thus, Aedesius sought to impress on the heart and mind of the man in the street the image of the sage as an informal and popular figure (his τρόπος was κοινὸς καὶ δημοτικός), while at the same time "he tried to implant in his pupils a feeling of harmony and responsibility towards mankind, seeing that they

[3] On Antoninus, see: Eunapius *VS* VI 9, 15–17 Giangrande; on Sarapio, Damascius, *Phil.Hist.* fr. 111 Athanassiadi. The fact that the ideal of the pagan holy man is one of mildness, charm and popularity (as illustrated by Plotinus and propagated by Iamblichus) does not mean that the philosophical circles did not abound in men who failed to incarnate this ideal. Arrogance was a hallmark of many and it is exactly such an attitude that Iamblichus and Aedesius are trying to curb in their pupils and colleagues and that Eunapius criticises openly, as in the case of Maximus (*VS* VII 2,7; 3,12 and esp. 4,2), or indirectly when he contrasts the amiable and popular Aedesius with Priscus (*VS* VIII 1, 1–5).

[4] See: Athanassiadi, *Le théurge comme dispensateur universel de la grâce: entre les* Oracles chaldaïques *et Jamblique*, forthcoming.

[5] See below, p. 000.

[6] Eunapius *VS* V 1,7–10.

were intolerant, overbearing and too arrogant on account of their theoretical training; when they spread wings which were more fragile than those of Icarus, he would bring them gently down not into the sea, but to the land and to human understanding (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον)[7].

As Dominic O'Meara has argued in a series of publications, contrary to the widely held view that the late Platonists were exclusively interested in higher metaphysics, divinisation was conceived in these circles as the crowning point in an educational curriculum whose initial stages coincided with the building of the practical or political virtues[8]. This process took place in the midst of society. O'Meara illustrates his point by systematically analyzing those works of the later Platonists which deal specifically with political philosophy. What I would like to do here is to go one step further (or rather one step back) and show that the concern for the moral shaping and reform of humanity in general was a major preoccupation of the divine man. This solicitude is not to be found only in works of political philosophy, but constitutes the moving force behind the sage's oral and written teaching activity. The evidence from Iamblichus' correspondence — a genre between orality and literariness — to which the rest of this paper is devoted, provides a nice illustration of this point.

II. The correspondence of Iamblichus[9]

1. *General principles*

To realise how true and faithful a pupil of Iamblichus Aedesius was in terms of sociability, we have to leave their common biographer and turn to the testimony of the master himself. We have the extraordinarily good fortune to possess several of the letters that Iamblichus sent to pupils of his after they had taken leave of him. Albeit transmitted as extracts by the fifth-century anthologist John of Stobi, the fragments of the twenty letters which have come down to us in this way may be viewed as an organic whole, illustrating the genre of protreptic epistolography cultivated by or simply attributed to the major divine men of early and late antiquity, whether Pythagoras or Apollonius of Tyana. Such collections of genuine or pseudepigraphic letters were preserved in the libraries of philosophical schools, to be consulted,

[7] *Ibidem*, VIII 1, 5–8.

[8] See esp.: *Platonopolis. Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity*, Oxford 2003.

[9] Two editions of this correspondence with introductory texts, translation and notes have recently appeared: J.M. Dillon and W. Polleichtner, *Iamblichus of Chalcis: The Letters*, Atlanta 2009, where the fragments from Stobaeus are classified in alphabetical order of the recipient's name, and Giamblico. *I frammenti dalle Epistole: Introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commento* a cura di D.P. Taormina e R.M. Piccione, Rome 2010, which follows the sequence of the fragments in Stobaeus' *Anthologium* in the edition of C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense. All my references are to the latter work, henceforth quoted as T&P, and consequently the numbering of Iamblichus' letters is given as established by Wachsmuth and Hense. On the other hand, translations of extensive passages, despite alterations, are based on Dillon & Polleichtner. I am extremely grateful to the two Italian scholars who put at my disposal their work before its publication.

quoted and discussed by masters and pupils[10]. More importantly however, as shown by the task undertaken by Stobaeus, moralising letter writing of this kind, free of scholastic technicalities, was intended to travel beyond the walls of the philosophical school and reach a wider public of laymen[11].

As preserved by Stobaeus, the letters of Iamblichus appear as a manual of practical philosophy firmly based on the four cardinal Platonic virtues and on Stoic ethics, with the theme of *paideia* in all its multiple dimensions and applications inspiring and guiding Man in his daily routine. Breaking away from Stobaeus' rigid classification[12], in what follows we shall focus our attention on two relevant questions: on the one hand, we will attempt to explore Iamblichus' link with each one of his correspondents, and on the other to identify the general and specific preoccupations which were on the mind of the two parties at the time of the exchange. The abundance and variety of the fragments which constitute the corpus should allow us to respond adequately to these objectives.

2. *Themes of the correspondence and its anthropology*

The recipients of Iamblichus' letters (some of whom may not even be former pupils) belong to the so-called elites of the Empire, as even a quick prosopographical survey suffices to attest. Addressing them, Iamblichus has in mind their function as administrators and how they can best perform it; this is why the main emphasis in these letters is laid on the four cardinal virtues and on their colophon, *virtue* itself in its theological hypostasis as the good or the one. Specific questions raised by each correspondent are, as it would appear, individually answered by Iamblichus. The master's discourse is deployed against a background of constant anxiety for the state of the world, yet the tone is not pessimistic. A deep trust in divine providence informs this correspondence, in which the sage advises the generation of active men and women how to behave themselves, but also how to educate both their subjects and their own progeny so that harmony may be restored in the cosmos.

Perceiving the times in which he lived as an exceptionally troubled period when, as a result of the progress of Christianity among other factors, discord had been abundantly sown in society and in the cosmos, Iamblichus stresses the benefits of concord (ὁμόνοια, ὁμογνωσύνη) as much to the individual as to the state, while underlining the multiple evils which derive from a conflictual state of mind (II 33, 15). Writing to one of his frequent correspondents, Macedonius, whom we assume to be a high official, Iamblichus emphasises, in the relatively short fragment preserved by Stobaeus, the dangers which result for the self and for the community when a man's thoughts and opinions (λογισμοί) are not the outcome of a mind concordant with itself. "Unbalanced" (ἀστάθμητος), and "at war with himself" (πολέμιος πρὸς ἑαυτόν), such a person soon becomes a public danger, and all the more so if he oc-

[10] See: Damascius, *In Phaed.* I 548 Westerink and Olympiodorus, *In Gorg.* 46, 9, pp. 242, 1–9 Westerink. Cf. the comments of T&P, pp. 66, 74–75, 80–81.

[11] T&P point out the "spirito didattico dell anthologia", but also of the original, p. 77.

[12] On which, see the equivalent tables in T&P, pp. 49–51 and 82–85.

cupies a position of power. Behind Iamblichus' statement may lurk the suggestion that those educated Christians who led the community in their capacity as bishops or secular administrators without having first resolved their private tensions between an education based on the classics and a religion which opposed it on all crucial matters, were a source of public evil.

The *pax deorum* was broken because of human ingratitude, which to Iamblichus' mind is "the absolute evil" (πάνδεινον), since it turns upside down the space which by right belongs to the good (τὴν χώραν αὐτῷ [τῷ ἀγαθῷ] παντελῶς ἀνατρέπει), thus depriving mankind of divine assistance[13]. This thinly disguised reference to Christian impiety and to the evils which proceed from it is to be found in a letter addressed by the master to his favourite pupil and heir apparent, Sopater (II 46, 16). In another letter, "On truth", equally addressed to Sopater (III 11, 35), Iamblichus dwells on the antithesis between the right approach to the gods, which entails the search for the truth, and thus turns us towards the Intellect and enhances what is best in us, and the idolatrous activity of those who cling to outward appearances and are masters in deception, forever wandering "in godless darkness"[14].

As one would have expected, there is much in this correspondence about the four cardinal virtues. But what is of interest in the present context is the emphasis laid by Iamblichus on the practical and social aspect of all four of them. A letter addressed to a certain Asphalius — an imperial administrator and a former pupil, as one may safely assume from the tone — describes reason/wisdom (φρόνησις) in philosophical language as the inner eye which contemplates the Intellect and the vehicle which ensures our communication with the divine. Its highest function however consists in the way this virtue can be applied to the directing of human society (III 3.26). As the quality which enables us to become as much like god as is humanly possible, wisdom is nothing less than the science of guiding and governing human relations in cities and households as well as in private lives[15].

After treating the couple φρόνησις — ἀφροσύνη (III 3 and 4), Stobaeus devotes a section to σωφροσύνη (temperance or self-control), in which he includes several fragments from a letter of Iamblichus to a lady by the name of Arete (III 5, 9; and 45–50). The letter is of especial interest to us, as Arete seems to have been an obstinate and even quarrelsome person, whose aggressiveness Iamblichus is trying to curb by singing the praises of moderation. As the immortal virtue par excellence, σωφροσύνη frees the soul from the constraints of passion and renders us perfect, he writes. In order to better impress this upon her mind, Iamblichus talks of the harmony of the universe which in its spatial as well as temporal dimension is the result of a reasoned accord between different powers, just as good social behaviour results from the balanced accord between the virtues which characterise the three

[13] On the triple negativity of ingratitude (ontological, ethical and political), see T&P, n. 182, p. 424.

[14] Behind the specific vocabulary used here by Iamblichus the reader easily detects a reference to Christianity. For similar expressions in a similar context, see T&P n. 264, p. 483.

[15] Cf. κυβερνητική τις ἐστὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῆς ὅλης ἐν αὐτοῖς διατάξεως ἀρχηγός.

parts of the soul. Not content however with this theoretical exposition, Iamblichus finds it necessary to strengthen his argument by the additional use of allegory: first he explains how, through hard discipline, Bellerophon succeeded in destroying, not just the Chimaera, but the whole tribe of savage beasts, which in Iamblichus' analysis symbolise the host of passions assaulting the human soul. The second myth is also a popular one: Perseus slaying Gorgo. Having reached, with the help of Athena, the very peak of moderation and self-control, Perseus was able to destroy Gorgo, who, in Iamblichus' exegesis "drags men down to materiality and, through mindless self--gratification, petrifies them".

What is impressive is the energy that Iamblichus was prepared to spend in order to impress on Arete (in all probability a former pupil, already living, as it would appear from later evidence, on her estate in Phrygia) the virtues of sociable behaviour. Equally interesting is the utter failure of philosophical admonition to reform character: Arete seems to have continued in her eristic ways well into her old age, when the Emperor Julian was obliged to visit her in an attempt to solve the problems which had arisen between her and her neighbours[16].

There follow letters on courage (ἀνδρεία) and on justice (δικαιοσύνη) to officials in the administrative network of the Empire[17]. The letter to Olympius (III 7, 40–41) presents courage at once as a mental attitude and as a practical virtue which takes into consideration the opportune moment in politics, while ignoring any toil and danger in the cause of the good (ἡ ἀνδαγαθία τῶν πράξεων, τὰ καλά... δι' αὐτὰ αἱρουμένη καὶ πράττουσα). More than any other virtue, courage is for Iamblichus "the very identity of a mind true to itself" (τοῦ νοῦ ταυτότης καὶ μόνιμος ἕξις ἐν ἑαυτῇ). As will be emphasised later, the concept of identity was one of crucial importance in this society, and Iamblichus' choice of equating courage with the very essence of Man is not accidental. Finally two short fragments from a letter to a certain Anatolius take up the theme of justice, which constitutes the end and the summation of all the virtues. But the justice that Iamblichus proposes is a wholly political virtue promoting peaceful coexistence with one's neighbours and emphasising the usefulness of all manner of social contracts. Maybe, as in the case of Arete, Iamblichus had in mind the character of his addressee and wrote accordingly.

3. *The philosopher as the benefactor of humanity*

The insistence of Iamblichus on the qualities of self-control, goodwill, affability, fair-mindedness, generosity, altruism, philanthropy, mildness, accessibility, "honey-sweet modesty" and the ability to make concessions surpasses by far the genre requirements of political philosophy and protreptic epistolography, and can in no way be attributed to its *topoi*. These qualities represent the genuine concerns of the man who had re-introduced Pythagorean modes of behaviour into the realm

[16] See: Julian, *Letter to Themistius* 259d and cf. Athanassiadi, *Julian: an intellectual biography*, London 1992², p.43.

[17] On the possible identity of the addressees of these letters (Olympius and Anatolius), see: T&P, n. 243, p. 467 and n. 255, p. 475 respectively.

of philosophy and who, far from producing a set panegyric for the ruler, writes *ad hoc* letters to individuals who are his juniors in every possible respect. In two letters (one of which is addressed to Sopater (III 31, 9 cf. II 2, 5 to 20), Iamblichus recommends a form of behaviour characterised by αἰδώς. Modesty, shame and respect towards oneself and others are the connotations attached to this notion so crucial in the Greek tradition, whose Homeric and Hesiodic pedigree Iamblichus is careful to stress.

In a society in which shamelessness and venality were current coin throughout the central administration, as the anti-corruption legislation indicates[18], a man who had been brought up in a now declining culture of private munificence develops the theme of public benefaction. Writing to Dyscolius, governor of Syria in the early 320s, the old philosopher dwells on the interdependence of the individual and the public good (IV 5, 62; 74), while recommending generosity as the hallmark of the ruler. From his privileged position, the ruler should unceasingly pour out donations in a totally disinterested spirit, "not reckoning them up as in a scales equal for equal" (IV 5, 75). The crown of his administration should be a decoration (or a world) — κόσμος — made up of benefactions, as Iamblichus somewhat poetically concludes (*ibid.*). Whether in their public or private capacity, the addressees of Iamblichus' letters are encouraged to be above all benefactors of their fellow men.

4. *Concern for the future. How to educate the young*

Iamblichus was an educationalist who saw his pedagogic task as one of his major roles in society. As well as producing a theoretical treatise in ten books, corresponding to the same number of steps in the educational process, he systematised, both thematically and methodologically, the curriculum of studies proper to each stage[19]. But these arrangements concerned those who, having completed their basic education, were embarking on a philosophical training. By contrast, in his correspondence Iamblichus deals with fundamentals, advising on the best way of bringing up children. Addressing in this respect a letter full of parental solicitude to his favourite pupil, Sopater, he emphasises the gradual, painfully slow and complex character of the educational process and calls attention on the importance of the right approach at the outset (II 31,122): as in the case of plants and animals, the growth and prosperity of human beings depends on a good start. Against a theoretical background firmly based on Plato's *Laws*, Iamblichus is careful to provide practical detail on how inner balance can best be achieved. Brief admonitions rather than long

[18] On one aspect of corruption in the later Roman empire, linked to the practice of *suffragium*, see: A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602*, Oxford 1964, pp. 391–396. On the Emperor Julian's attempt to control corruption, P. Athanassiadi, *Julian*, pp. 116–117.

[19] For an ingenious reconstruction of the ten books of the *Pythagorean Synagoge*, see: D. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived: mathematics and philosophy in late antiquity*, Oxford 1989, pp. 30–105. For the permanent vogue of the Iamblichan curriculum of studies in late antique philosophical training, see: P. Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: de Numénius à Damascius,* Paris 2006, pp. 169–174 and eadem, *Canonizing Platonism: the fetters of Iamblichus* [in:] E. Thomassen (ed.), *Canon and Canonicity*, Copenhagen 2010, pp. 129–141.

speeches are more likely to impress the mind of a child, he cunningly states. It is not enough for parents and tutors to set a good example through their own behaviour; in order to sow the seeds of virtue "in young and tender souls", they must enable the children to foster their own criteria of good and evil by exposing them to the conditions of real life with all its good and bad aspects. Only in this way will they acquire a sound judgment and an even disposition, developing the intellectual and moral stamina which will enable them to prosper in society.

As well as being the recipient of the letter on how to raise children, Sopater is the addressee of a letter on dialectic (II 2, 6), a topic of particular interest to Iamblichus, on which he also writes to Dexippus (II 2, 5), author of a surviving introduction to the *Categories* of Aristotle. A divine gift and an innate blessing strengthened by training, dialectic is relevant to all walks of life and all activities. As the essence of philosophical methodology, it enables the researcher to distinguish truth from falsehood and promotes scientific enquiry. In all cases, a good grounding in this discipline bolsters human judgement and renders it capable of solving ambiguities, whether in the realm of divine pronouncements, such as obscure oracles, or in everyday life, where it functions as an instrument which clears the mists from the intellectual horizon .

What emerges with sufficient clarity from Iamblichus' discourse on the benefits of a dialectical training is his deep concern regarding the declining standards in education; it is indeed this decline that he holds responsible not only for the increased levels of irrationality and ignorance that he sees around him, but more particularly for the break with tradition, which results in the weakening and eventual loss of cultural and spiritual identity. These concerns are shared by Iamblichus' correspondents and mirrored in their letters to him.

An example of the way in which Iamblichus' pupils were marked by him is offered by a certain Julian who was an important official at the Imperial court and a man of action[20]. In close contact with Sopater and his homonymous son[21], Julian emerges from his correspondence as an inner-circle member and a crucial link in the network of *gnorimoi*, who spreads the message that Iamblichus has come to the world at this critical moment in history as its saviour[22]. What characterizes these letters is the intensity of single-minded adoration: in them Iamblichus has all the attributes of a divine figure: he is "the great statue of the oecumene", combining the

[20] The letters of this Julian to Iamblichus and to Sopater have been included by J. Bidez and F. Cumont in their edition of the Emperor Julian's letters under the heading *Epistulae spuriae vel dubiae* [in:] *Imperatoris Caesaris Flavii Claudii Iuliani, Epistulae, leges, poematia, fragmenta, varia (=ELF)*, Paris 1922. To distinguish them here from the genuine letters of the Emperor Julian, I precede them by an *. For the possible identity of Julian, see: T.D. Barnes, *A correspondent of Iamblichus*, GRBS 19 (1978), pp. 99–106, and more recently, J. Vanderspoel, *Correspondence and correspondents of Julius Julianus*, Byzantion 69, (1999), pp. 396–478, who puts forward the improbable proposition that Iamblichus' correspondent is to be identified with the Emperor Julian's maternal grandfather. On the whereabouts of Julian, see the information he provides himself in ep. *181.

[21] See *Ep.* *182 to Sopater; cf. *Epp.** 184, *185 for contacts with the two Sopaters, father and son.

[22] See *Ep.* *187, 406c: ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους ταχθείς.

gifts of Hermes and Asclepios (*Ep.* *181); "the good father" (ἀγαθὸς πατήρ, *Epp.* *181, *183), who never stops looking after his "genuine children", while criticising them with a view to their improvement (ἐγκαλεῖ παιδεύων, *Ep.* *184, 416c). Beyond the charmed circle of his own adepts, however, Iamblichus is seen as "the sacred anchorage" for whoever is battling with the waves in the stormy sea, and the man destined "to rekindle the sacred spark of true paideia" (*Ep.* *187, 406d).

5. *Political philosophy*

If Sopater himself did not succeed in making full use of his master's counselling, his sons at least seem to have taken such advice more to heart. What is certain is that they fared better than their father in the dangerous world of fourth-century politics. In his *Anthology* Stobaeus also preserves substantial parts of a treatise in epistolary form sent by the Apamean decurion Sopater Jr. to his brother Himerios, which was in all probability composed on the occasion of the latter's assumption of some office in the central administration (*Anth.* IV, 212, 16–213,1). The work, which sheds light on the history and ideology of a late antique intellectual clan and its cultural milieu, stems from the Hellenistic pseudo-Pythagorean tradition on kingship, whose products were legitimised by Iamblichus[23]. In it Sopater offers his brother practical advice on how to rule. From his intermediary position in the hierarchical structure of imperial power, the statesman must spare no effort in the task of educating both his inferiors and his superiors by "singing the Orthian hymn of virtue". He must never be afraid to appear politically incorrect, but "averting [his] eyes from the wrong opinions of the many", struggle towards the best life, the life of truth rather than the one built on the shaky foundations of the imagination (φαντασία), which for a Platonist constitutes the very basis of falsehood and non-existence. His use of punishment must be, in good Platonic tradition, corrective and therapeutic rather than vindictive, for the ruler must above all be ἀνεξίκακος. Forgetful of any evils done to him, he must consider all human beings as friends in a Pythagorean spirit, indeed as actual members of the philosophical circle to which he himself belongs (ἤδη γνωρίμους καὶ φίλους), preferring to suffer evil himself than to harm any of them.

It would take too long to enumerate all the ways in which the letter of Iamblichus' spiritual grandson reproduces the teaching of the master of Apamea. What is of relevance to the present context, however, is the fact that Sopater and Himerios were the very children on the subject of whose education Iamblichus had been advising their father. Dominic O'Meara notes that, as perceived by Stobaeus who classified them under the same heading, the excerpts from Sopater's speech and those from Iamblichus' letters to Dyscolius and Agrippa on the subject of ruling (*Anth.* IV 74–75 and IV 76–77 respectively), belong to the literary genre of the mirror of princes[24].

[23] The treatise has been studied by D. O'Meara, *A Neoplatonist ethics for high-level officials: Sopatros' Letter to Himerios* [in:] *The philosopher and society in late antiquity: essays in honour of Peter Brown*, A. Smith (ed.), Swansea 2005, pp. 91–100.

[24] On this point see D. O'Meara and J. Schamp (eds.), *Miroirs de prince de l'Empire romain au IVe siècle*, *Vestigia* 33, Fribourg–Paris 2006, *passim*.

They share themes, ideology, tone and vocabulary, and their addressees are men in the middle or upper echelons of the administrative machinery. To this collection one might add a tiny fragment from a letter to Eustathius, another member of a philosophical dynasty, whose life and achievement as teacher and public figure on important missions for the Empire abroad is narrated by Eunapius[25]. Though the letter has been classified by Stobaeus as a discourse on music, the criterion on which he has excerpted it seems to be the public good and how best it can be served. For it appears as a comment on the well known Platonic statement that great natures gone astray can produce great evil[26].

Initiated by Iamblichus, who lent his authority to the Hellenistic pseudepigrapha on political philosophy by pronouncing them genuine Pythagorean works[27], the tradition of practical counselling enjoyed tremendous popularity within the School. Marinus, Proclus and Olympiodorus, among others, defended it; but the man who truly followed in Iamblichus' footsteps in this area was the Emperor Julian, whose discourse, running in counterpoint to Christian imperial theology, has set a decisive seal on Byzantine political philosophy[28].

6. *Fate and Providence*

As one would have expected in an anthology of late antique doxography, a place of honour is assigned to the theme of Fate (or Εἱμαρμένη). Excerpts from three independent letters by Iamblichus on the subjects of fate, providence and the essence of the soul, sent respectively to Poimenius, Macedonius and Sopater, have also been preserved by Stobaeus. These excerpts constitute answers to specific questions asked by the addressees; they are comments on works published by them and more generally responses to commonly held views, current phobias and the usual complaints about the iniquities of Fortune. Iamblichus' emphasis is on the divinity, immortality and independence of the soul, its freedom of choice on all occasions and its unlimited authority in following the kind of life it wants[29]. In the missive to Macedonius, Iamblichus talks about the unity of the cosmos and the uniqueness of the principle which governs the apparent multiplicity of the world (I 5, 17). It is within this well ordered system, that, watched and assisted by divine providence, the individual soul has the capacity to break free from the power of fate (II 8, 46).

Sopater had composed a work *On providence and on those who fare well or badly contrary to what they deserve*[30], a statement that, in his letter to Macedonius,

[25] On Eustathius, who was husband and father to important figures in the Platonic movement of late antiquity, see Eunapius *VS* VI 5.

[26] II 31, 117, p. 229, 6–8 and Plato *Resp.* VI 491a–e.

[27] On this see: C. Macris, "Jamblique et la littérature pseudo-pythagoricienne", [in:] S.C. Mimouni (ed.), *Apocryphité: histoire d'un concept transversal aux religions du Livre*, Turnhout 2002, pp. 77–129.

[28] See most recently: P. Athanassiadi, *Vers la pensée unique: la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris 2010, pp. 87–94.

[29] For τὴν ἀδέσποτον τῆς ψυχῆς ἐξουσίαν see: II 8.44; for its αὐτεξούσιον: II 8, 43.

[30] Περὶ προνοίας καὶ τῶν παρὰ τὴν ἀξίαν εὐπραγούντων ἢ δυσπραγούντων: *Suda* IV, p. 407 s.v. '845 Sopatros'.

Iamblichus declares impious[31]. To the irreverent question, "why is it that one's share of good and bad things is disproportioned to one's worth?", asked not just by Sopater but by many, the master replies that the degree of closeness to the Good one can achieve is a matter of free choice, that adversity strengthens the soul and that, ultimately, virtue is its own reward. What transpires, however, under the stern didactic tone, is Iamblichus' need to broadcast an optimistic message to the world, a message of self-confidence and reliance on one's own inner strength. Realising that not just the uneducated, but also the men of his own circle believed that irrational forces govern the universe, he finds it necessary to dwell on the absolute goodness of the gods (ἄτρεπτος τῶν θεῶν ἀγαθότης) and their unfailing concern for the cosmos. He even declares Fate to be a benign force; as he puts it to Macedonius (II 8, 45), "all things subject to Fate are in fact under the dominion of Providence, since, in its very essence, Fate is enmeshed with Providence and only exists by virtue of the existence of Providence, deriving its being from Providence and [acting] within its ambit". Yet, finding it impossible to deny the fact that all sorts of absurd things occur at the level of sense-perception, he transposes his argument onto another register and concludes it by stating that "bliss (τὸ μακάριον) for us resides in the life of the intellect, since none of the intermediary things has the capacity either to increase or to take it away. It is therefore stupid to go on, as men generally do, about chance and its unequal gifts" (II 8, 48).

In the letter to Poimenius, Iamblichus' discourse is less optimistic and more practical or rather more down to earth. Having recourse to current theological language, he underlines how, by intervening when necessary, the gods mitigate the evils deriving from Fate; for this purpose he introduces the notion of ἐπανόρθωσις (which in this context does not sound very different from the equivalent Christian term of ἀποκατάστασις): "in controlling fate, the gods apply their corrective action throughout the universe. And this restitution (or "correction" ἐπανόρθωσις) of theirs brings about sometimes a lessening of evils, at other times just a consolation and, on occasion, their very removal" (I 1, 35).

7. *Anxiety for Sopater*

Eunapius tells us that on Iamblichus' death, his pupils dispersed in different directions, with the most gifted of them all, the Apamean Sopater, leaving his native city and dashing at full speed (ἔδραμεν ὀξύς) to the imperial court. Following oral tradition, Eunapius, who is the spiritual child of Aedesius and Chrysanthius, gives two motives for this hasty departure, one psychological arising from the man's character, the other political and ultimately connected with the school's policy of proselytising: we learn that on the human level Sopater was too arrogant "to condescend to associate with ordinary people", yet snobbery was not the ultimate motive for his move to the court; his real aim was to employ his argumentation in order

[31] Οὐδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀμφισβητεῖν ὅσιον: II 8, 47.

to convert Constantine to the philosophical life (μεταστήσων τῷ λόγῳ)[32]. At court Sopater reached a position of unique influence and was eventually responsible (as we know from other sources) for the theurgical rituals performed on the occasion of the founding of Constantinople (a fact, which incidentally makes 324 a *terminus ante quem* for the death of Iamblichus). As things turned out, however, not only was he unsuccessful in converting Constantine to Iamblichan Platonism, but he was soon to fall victim to a court plot and be executed at the Emperor's command[33].

Either as a good judge of character or through his divinatory art, Iamblichus must have sensed something of what was going to happen to his beloved pupil after his own death. His letters to Sopater are full of parental solicitude, betraying a considerable amount of anxiety on his behalf; they are also attempts to curb his worldly ambition. In a letter which sings the praises of virtue, Iamblichus speaks with feeling to the man who, having conquered all the technical expertise of Chaldaean wisdom[34], must now attempt to strike a balance between knowledge and ambition (III 1, 17; 49). It is only by transcending his ephemeral self, says Iamblichus, that Man can at last contemplate the good in itself. Then, and only then, his identity in a world in which people searched desperately for stability will no longer be subject to change: it will be an ἀμετάστατος ταυτότης (III 1, 49). Being inwardly unshakable, the pupil of philosophy will at last be εὐδαίμων — freed from worldly cares and indifferent to any of the vicissitudes that life may bring.

In what seems to have been the conclusion of this long letter, Iamblichus makes his definition of the εὐδαίμων dependent upon the crucial formula about divinisation in Plato's *Theaetetus*: "happy is he who resembles God as much as possible, being perfect, simple, pure, emancipated from human life"[35]. The way to achieve this is to live the noetic life within society, while enjoying to the full all the assets of a normal existence[36].

III. The Emperor Julian's pastoral philosophy

If we are to trust Eunapius, many of Iamblichus' actual pupils or simple followers regulated their lives according to his precepts, and a few at least succeeded in cultivating one or more aspects of the programme recommended by him. One man, however, took it upon himself to reform the world according to Iamblichus' teaching, propagating far and wide his model of the θεῖος ἀνήρ and the ideology that he

[32] Eunapius is a uniquely valuable source, for as he states in the proem of his work on the *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* (I 1, 6), one of his two objectives in writing is to fix and stabilise (διαπῆξαι καὶ στηρίξαι) the oral traditions about Iamblichus and his circle which had come down to him by the intermediary of his own master Chrysanthius who had been Aedesius' pupil.

[33] Eunapius *VS* VI 2; cf. Sozomenus, *HE* I 5, 1 and Zosimus II 40.3.

[34] See: Lydus, *Mens.*, IV 2, where Sopater is referred to as the τελεστής.

[35] IV 39, 23: εὐδαίμων ἐστὶν ὁ θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ὅμοιος, τέλειος, ἁπλοῦς, καθαρός, ἐξηρημένος ἀπὸ τὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς. Cf. Plato, *Theaet.* 176b.

[36] A family man himself, Iamblichus likens, in a letter on marriage the name of whose addressee has not been preserved, the relationship between male and female within the marital institution to "political rule, which pays equal heed to the common interest of both" (IV 23, 57).

embodied. This man was Claudius Flavius Julianus, whose adoration of the master of Apamea was no less fanatical than that of his namesake[37]; but, as a Byzantine Emperor, Julian had, next to the will, also the power to change the face of the world. Having been shaped by teachers who were the spiritual children and grandchildren of Iamblichus, Julian sought out men of the same calibre in order to use them as the main instruments of his political and religious campaign. The pool from which he drew his peers and collaborators in the two distinct areas of the the *politikos* and the *hieratikos bios* (*Ep.* 89b, 289a), was, primarily, the circle of pupils who had studied under his own tutor, Maximus of Ephesos[38]. And, as in his hierarchy of values he rated the religious above the civic[39], he turned all his attention to the figure of the priest whom he viewed as the vehicle through which the *pax deorum* would be re--established in the universal Empire.

In a series of epistles addressed to the chiefs of his "ecclesia" (dubbed by Gibbon "pastoral letters"), the *pontifex maximus* of Hellenism exposes the principles of his religious reform and sets out the criteria of selection that the high-priests ought to employ when recruiting the men and women who were to put it into effect. To his mind, only two cardinal qualities — genuine piety and love of humanity (τὸ φιλόθεον καὶ φιλάνθρωπον, *Ep.* 89b, 305a) — were the prerequisites for the ideal candidate. All else was bound to derive from these two fundamental virtues. Julian describes in meticulous detail the personal discipline to which the priests must submit themselves at all times and the social work that they are expected to perform in order to rid society of spiritual and material poverty. His insistence on organized charity towards good and bad, locals and immigrants, travellers and prisoners alike is impressive. "Charity has to be plentiful and of every conceivable kind" (ἡ δὲ φιλανθρωπία πολλὴ καὶ παντοία, *Ep.* 89b, 289b) is the bottom line of his discourse.

Equally influenced by Iamblichus' outlook is Julian's view of punishment as a corrective process. On several occasions he emphasizes its beneficial function, associating as he does disciplinary measures with the idea of conversion to a better life. For Julian, the ultimate objective of punishment is to heal men from the evil of metaphysical ignorance. As he puts it in a letter to the Very Reverent Theodora, the duty of the spiritual director is "to persuade and save" (πείθειν καὶ σῴζειν, *Ep.* 86). And in his address to the citizens of Bostra he condemns violence against the Christians and recommends an attitude of pity rather than one of hatred towards those who are in the wrong: "it is with words [or by reasoning: λόγῳ] that we ought to persuade and instruct people; not by blows or insults or physical assault" (*Ep.* 114, 438b).

While doing whatever was in his own power to alleviate human misery — and the establishment of all manner of charitable institutions was a major step in this

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[37] See Julian, *Ep.* 12 Bidez; cf. above, 000.

[38] On a network of γνώριμοι, see: *Ep.* 89a, 452b, to the High-priest Theodore, himself a pupil of Maximus.

[39] For the superiority of the priest's status over that of any secular magistrate, see Julian's statements in *Epp.* 84 and 88.

direction — Julian was bent on sending out optimistic messages in all directions and by all means. Thus, in his advisory missives to his clergy, he stresses the benign role of providence (*Ep.* 89b, 295c, 301a) and emphasises the cosmic and eschatological solicitude of the gods for the world.[40] At the same time, clearly with the emperor's approval if not at his instigation, his mentor, Sallustius, whom Julian had appointed to the office of the prefect of the East, circulated a brief catechism entitled *On the gods and the cosmos*, destined for the man in the street (*De diis* 13.1). In this manual of pagan belief and worship, Sallustius popularises the basic theoretical and practical tenets of Iamblichan piety, explaining in simple language that, where Providence is present, evil (which in the Platonic thought-world is no more than the absence of the good), has no place. Just like Julian, his prefect concentrates on banishing fear from the hearts of men, and lending them an optimistic outlook.

Between Iamblichus' protreptic epistolography, Julian's "pastoral letters" and Sallustius' catechetical discourse there is an unmistakable family likeness. More than the community of the values preached, it is their sense of urgency that binds these texts together. The tone of the address may differ — avuncular in Iamblichus, self-righteous in Julian, bureaucratic in Sallustius — but the underlying concern in all three authors is how to preserve in a rapidly changing world a culture that is at once humane and heavenly-minded.

Though discernibly descended from its classical antecedent, this culture had sufficiently mutated in the intervening centuries to have developed its own social and spiritual ideal in the figure of the θεῖος ἀνήρ. By the time Iamblichus appeared on the scene variations of this ideal were to be found in several milieus — the philosophical, the magical, the theosophical, even the sophistic. What Iamblichus did was to select specific features from a diffuse social ideal and build them into a well-defined hierarchical structure, which he illustrated by the life of an imaginary Pythagoras. But he did not stop there. He promoted this ideal in the daily routine that he shared with his pupils, and broadcast it in a copious correspondence with those who were called to play an active — indeed a leading — role in society. What strikes the reader of this correspondence, even in the fragmentary form in which it has reached us, is the emphasis laid on the social, rather than the narrowly political, role that the people advised by Iamblichus are called upon to play. This lesson was fully understood by the Emperor Julian: using the same medium as Iamblichus in the instruction of his priestly class, he insisted on the importance of the social function of the men and women who were to act as the shock troops of his religious reform.

[40] *Ep.* 89b, 298d–299a, a passage which gives prominence to the Iamblichan notion of ἐπανόρθωσις (299a).

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XVII

Julian the Theurgist: Man or Myth?

1 The state of the question

Who was the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*? For Hans Lewy the answer was simple: relying on the unanimous agreement of the sources, he attributed the paternity of the *Oracles* to two Julians, father and son – surnamed respectively "the Chaldaean" and "the Theurgist" – who lived at the time of Marcus Aurelius.[1] Yet, while attributing the *Oracles* to these two men, Lewy also emphasized the factor of revelation in connection with this literature. Commenting on the perspective of those who used the *Oracles* as their sacred book, he writes: "the Neoplatonists who believed in the legitimate character of the inspiration frequently quoted the Chaldæan Oracles as utterances of the gods themselves and did not mention quite so often their Chaldæan hypophets who, in their opinion, had only played a secondary part."[2]

Unlike modern scholars, whose agnostic minds tend to reject the claim of the sources and who therefore propose anonymity as an alternative – and safer – answer to the problem of authorship,[3] in dealing with this complex question Lewy took the ancient testimony at face value, while at the same time following the thinking patterns of the era which produced, received and transmitted the sacred verses. So should we, establishing in the first place what the concept of authorship meant to the men of that period.

The notion of authorship emerged in Greece in the 8th-7th centuries B. C. There naturally arose at the same time the issue of whether a work was of genuine or of spurious parentage, namely pseudepigraphic. As

[1] Suda I 434, II 642, 1f. Adler. For the date, cf. also Procl. In Remp. II 123, 12; In Crat. 72, 10f., and cf. Porph. fr. 294F Smith = Aug. civ. X 9 for *vir in Chaldaea bonus*.

[2] Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles* 6.

[3] Cf. Cremer 10, des Places, Oracles 2, and more recently Hadot, "Bilan ..." 705f. For a synthesizing discussion of the question, cf. now Lanzi, "La questione ...".

Wolfgang Speyer has argued in this connection, however, the latter category should be sub-divided into two separate groups: products of intentional deceit (the Book of Daniel or the Apocalypse of Zoroaster belong to this category, as Porphyry went to great lengths to prove),[4] and what he terms as "echte religiöse Pseudepigraphie".[5] In the latter case, the question of authorship is complicated by the issue of divine inspiration: to whom does the end result of ἐνθουσιασμός belong? Is it the discourse of the god who reveals the message, or that of the prophet who transmits it? With regard to the *Oracles*, the Neoplatonists seem to distinguish between the two, though without fully clarifying the nature of the distinction.[6] But when referring to the human agent, they tend to attribute the authorship to one man: Julian the Theurgist.[7]

2 The man

2.1 History and prehistory

This duality – or rather, ambiguity – of authorship is well illustrated by the story of the birth of Julian the Theurgist, as told by the eleventh-century polymath Michael Psellus. According to this story (which does not fall into any of the stereotypical narrative categories concerning the birth of divine men), before siring his son, Julian the Chaldaean addressed a prayer to the "Holder of the All" (or the supreme god) requesting that the boy should be endowed with the soul of an archangel. When his son was

[4] Porph. Chr. fr. 43 Harnack (for the Book of Daniel), and Porph. Plot. 16: "I [Porphyry] wrote a considerable number of refutations of the book of Zoroaster, which I showed to be entirely spurious and modern."

[5] Speyer, "Fälschung ...".

[6] A differentiation which is evident in the expressions used in this connection by Damascius: τοὺς θεούς, ἐν οἷς ἔπεσι λέγουσι πρὸς τὸν θεουργόν· (Princ. I 154, 15 R. = II 105, 1f. W. - C.) and οἱ θεοὶ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεουργός (In Parm. II 203, 27f. R. = III 129, 1f. W. - C. - S.).

[7] The earliest surviving authority to mention Julian the Theurgist as the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles* (in connection with Iamblichus' voluminous commentary on this work) is the emperor Julian (Ep. 12 Bidez); elsewhere, the emperor mentions "the Chaldaean" (Or. VIII [V], 12 [172D]), presumably referring to Julian the Theurgist by his family name, as I argue later in this paper. More often than not one finds in the sources the designation "the Chaldaean prophets" (Iamb. De myst. III 31 p. 176, 2 P.) or simply "the Chaldaeans" (cf. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles* 443), a device perhaps inspired by the principle of hieronymy rather than by rhetorical conventions.

born, he put his archangelic soul in contact with all the gods and also with the soul of Plato which dwelt with Apollo and Hermes.[8] Let us attempt to analyse this story which lies at the heart of Neoplatonic mythology, going at least as far back as Proclus, who is Psellus' direct source.[9]

A prophet is being manufactured here according to a number of specifications: firstly, he receives an angelic soul, that is one belonging to the highest category of spiritual beings after the gods in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of cosmic powers.[10] Secondly, after he is born, the prophet enjoys communion with all the gods *and* with the deified soul of Plato. This double familiarity accounts for the character of the revelation which he will deliver to mankind. Coming from these two heavenly sources, all his λόγια are necessarily θεοπαράδοτα[11] and, at the same time, they are marked with a Platonic seal. As was understood and explained by the commentators, from whose works we glean the lines which make up our collection, the two elements are indistinguishable: the divine revelation is clothed from birth in the Platonic idiom. I emphasize this point (already made by Lewy)[12] because, starting from the same premises, H. D. Saffrey proposes a two-fold origin for the *Chaldaean Oracles* – an older theurgical stratum and a more recent Platonic one for which Julian the Theurgist would be solely responsible:

> Les Oracles Chaldaïques sont donc une collection composite réunissant d'une part de vieux oracles chaldaïques, peut-être rassemblés par Julien-père, et de nouveaux oracles chaldaïques proférés par Julien-fils. Ces nouveaux oracles sont les oracles platoniciens qui ont fait les délices des maîtres des Néoplatonismes syrien et athénien.[13]

It should be pointed out in this connection that in the whole of the literary tradition concerning the *Oracles* there is not the slightest hint of

[8] Psellus, Opusc. phil. I 46, 46-51.

[9] Following Westerink, "Proclus ..." 275-280, des Places, Oracles 154 and esp. 203 shows that on the subject of the *Chaldaean Oracles* Psellos depends entirely on Proclus. For further arguments supporting this thesis cf. Athanassiadi, "Byzantine ..." 238 n. 3.

[10] This point was already emphasized by Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles* 224. One should add that in the Chaldaean-Platonic world-view the souls of the theurgists which dwell in the angelic sphere (OC 138.153) descend of their own accord in order to save humanity: cf. Iamb. VP 8.

[11] Procl. In Crat. 59, 19f.

[12] Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles* 75.176.

[13] Saffrey, "Les néoplatoniciens ..." 220 = 74.

anything which allows us to make such a distinction: 'theurgical' or 'spiritual', 'magical' or 'philosophical', the λόγια are regarded by their exegetes as forming a single corpus, a perfect unity, rather like that which a few centuries later would be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.[14] Their complex character finds ideal expression in the person of Julian the Father himself, whom Hesychius of Miletos, an early-sixth century pagan with possible Neoplatonic connections, designates as both a Chaldaean and a philosopher.[15]

A third point which emerges from the Psellus-Proclus story concerns the collaboration of father and son in the production of the Chaldaean revelation: as already mentioned, when referring to the *Oracles* the Neoplatonists speak either of the Chaldaeans or merely of "the Chaldaean", meaning the son rather than the father. With these preliminary considerations in mind, let us now turn to the historical milieu from which the two Julians seem to have emerged.

2.2 Origins and milieu

The lives of the two Julians span the Antonine era: the father is supposed to have moved from his native Babylon to Rome (which may mean either the city itself or a province of the empire, presumably Syria) as a sequel to Trajan's triumphant Oriental campaign (A. D. 115-116), and the *floruit* of the son is placed in the reign of Marcus Aurelius.[16] While I

[14] It should be pointed out that the false perspective of the dual character (and authorship) of the *Oracles* put forward by Saffrey is to some extent dictated by the present structure of the corpus of the fragments. In "The Chaldaean Oracles ..." 157-159 I discussed the criteria and analysed the methodology which led Kroll in 1894 to construct the corpus of the *Chaldaean Oracles* which is still in use, and proposed a new edition of the fragments based on the systematic and meticulous gleaning of all the sources and relevant literature; instead of imprisoning the *membra disiecta* of the *Oracles* within an ideological straightjacket (as Kroll and his successors have done), such an edition should be arranged according to authorial provenance, following a strictly chronological order, while at the same time reproducing and discussing the context of each fragment. Already started within the limited context of my postgraduate seminar at the University of Athens, this project needs to be integrated into an international research framework.

[15] Suda I 433, II 641, 32 Adler. It is well known that the Suda article, from which we draw this information, depends on the *Onomatologos* of Hesychius: Adler, "Suidas ..." 706-708; cf. Kaldellis.

[16] Cf. Bidez, *La vie de l'Empereur Julien* 75.

have no reason to contest the evidence of the sources as regards the chronology of father and son, I suspect, on onomastic grounds, that the two Julians were not newcomers to the Empire. The choice of the name Julian (a common *cognomen*, which by the second century A. D. is also attested as a family name or *nomen*) suggests a strong desire for Romanisation; at the same time, the ethnic and professional connotations of the epithet Chaldaeus (which is testified by this date as a *gentilicium*)[17] also indicate a continuing attachment to their roots. In all probability we are dealing with Roman citizens, the combination of an indigenous and a Roman element constituting a common pattern in the onomastics of Roman Syria.[18] Accordingly, following both epigraphic and other literary evidence, I would argue that the name *Chaldaeus* is in fact the family name of the two Julians. But before I proceed any further with questions of identity, let me provide some background.

A marginal note in an early-tenth century manuscript of Iamblichus the Novelist's *Babyloniaca* offers the following information about its author:

> This Iamblichus was a Syrian on both his father's and his mother's side, a Syrian not in the sense of the Greeks who have settled in Syria, but of the native ones, who knew the language of the Syrians and lived by their customs. Until, as he says, a Babylonian tutor took charge of him, and taught him the Babylonian language and customs and culture ... This Babylonian had been taken prisoner at the time when Trajan invaded Babylon, and was sold to the Syrian by the dealers in spoils. And he was skilled in barbarian learning to the extent of having been one of the royal secretaries while in his native land. As for Iamblichus himself, who knew his native Syrian language, and subsequently also learned Babylonian, he says that afterwards, by application and use, he acquired Greek also, to the extent of becoming a skilled rhetor.[19]

Whatever the value of this information in connection with the author of the *Babyloniaca*, its relevance to our story is incontestable. For this is the milieu of the two Julians, as Lewy himself recognised (*Chaldaean Oracles* 428) – the syncretistic ambiance from which the *Chaldaean Oracles* sprung. But what about their more distant provenance? As I have argued elsewhere,[20] such a search is likely to take us to Babylon, and more specifically to the temple of Bel-Marduk – the famous Esagil – with its

[17] Schulze 113 n. 2, and see below.
[18] Cf. Rey-Coquais.
[19] Phot. Bibl. 94, II 40 n. 1 Henry (translation by Millar 491, slightly modified).
[20] Cf. Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 43-45.

practice of divination through divine inspiration, all the more so as from time immemorial the term "Chaldaios" suggested to Greek ears an expert in divination connected with this particular temple.[21]

However, long before the dawn of the Hellenistic era, Bel-Marduk had extended his sphere of influence far beyond the boundaries of Chaldaea, becoming known further afield simply as Bel or Baal – 'the Lord'. In Apamea and Palmyra – two cities with partly contiguous territories, which in the second century A. D. boasted magnificent temples of the god – Bel's name served as an epithet of the cosmic divinity Adad or Hadad. This is the very god whom Proclus identifies with the Twice Beyond of the *Chaldaean Oracles*,[22] the δὶς ἐπέκεινα, who is above all the gods and goddesses whom Julian the Chaldaean brought into communion with his son's soul. If in Apamea nothing remains of the famous oracle complex, in Palmyra the majestic ruins of the temple of Bel evoke even today something of its former grandeur. Beyond the sacred precinct, the stones still speak of the Chaldaean identity of its citizens: in several funerary inscriptions we read in Palmyrene script the name KLDY' – a partly ethnic, partly professional designation, which here clearly functions as a family name.[23] One is tempted to make a connection with the Eumolpids, the Kerykes or the Branchids, hereditary priestly castes attached to particular sanctuaries. Could it be that the Chaldaeans fulfilled such a role in the Syrian temples of Bel? Two considerations tend in this direction.

Though priestly castes connected with particular sanctuaries were a known factor in the Greek world, transmission of esoteric knowledge from father to son in the specific case of the Chaldaeans is singled out for particular comment by Diodorus of Sicily;[24] and we also know that in the Oriental priestly elites it was the practice for names to be handed down from father to son, as in the present case.[25] But there are still other factors which suggest a connection between the Julians and Apamea.

Against the background that Julian the Chaldaean was, according to the Suda (and, more importantly therefore, to Hesychius) a philoso-

[21] Herodotus I 181-183. For Chaldeans as experts in astrology, see Tanaseanu-Döbler in this volume.

[22] Procl. In Parm. VII 58, 33 - 60, 9 K. - L. Cf. also Seng, "Ἅπαξ ἐπέκεινα ...".

[23] For a discussion of the evidence, cf. Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 45 n. 45.

[24] Cf. Diod. Sic. II 29, 4. The testimony of Diodorus is important for the cultural traditions which the Chaldaioi of Babylon had brought to the wider Hellenistic World; for relevant references, cf. Bidez - Cumont I 176.

[25] Cf. Bidez - Cumont I 172f. (à propos of Ostanes).

pher, we may recall the figure of the Apamene Aurelius Belius Philippus, whose theophoric name, falling into the same category as that of the Julians, is a fascinating compound of Semitic, Greek and Roman elements. A priest of Bel, according to a dedicatory inscription dated on technical grounds to the second century A. D., Belius Philippus was at the same time head of the city's Epicurean school.[26] I have elsewhere argued that the oecumenical tastes of that philosopher-priest may have had something to do with the favourable picture of the Epicurean communities painted by his more famous fellow-citizen, Numenius,[27] and this point brings us to the second stage of my argument – the personal contact of the author of the *Oracles* with Numenius.

The relationship between the philosophical system which emerges from the meagre fragments of Numenius' writings and the theology of the *Chaldaean Oracles* has already been sufficiently emphasized. In this connection, Dodds has spoken of a bridge between the two, where the traffic may have moved in both directions.[28] This is an important insight. To my mind at least, the resemblances between the two texts suggest personal contact in a common milieu: for, if one listens carefully, one may hear a continuous dialogue between two individuals with distinct talents and vocations who have blossomed in the same environment. Indeed, it has not yet been noticed that in his treatise *On the Good* Numenius does no less than give an account, step by step, of the prophet's visitation by the δὶς ἐπέκεινα or Bel-Hadad. The passage in question[29] states that one should begin by addressing a prayer to the Second god, whose middle nature between the transcendent First god (the ἅπαξ ἐπέκεινα of the *Oracles*) and the physical world renders him accessible to the person who understands how the divine hierarchies are structured.[30] If summoned in the right way (which involves a long preparation, both ritualistic and spiritual), the god is bound to become his own conductor or interpreter (γνώμων), and reveal by means of speech the treasure of his thoughts.[31] While the First god remains inactive, the Second descends to be united in his intellectual hypostasis (that is, *qua* νοῦς) with all those who have the ability to communicate with him.[32]

[26] Smith, "An Epicurean priest ...".
[27] Cf. my analysis of this point in Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 100f.
[28] Dodds, "New light ..." 271.
[29] Numenius, fr. 11f. des Places
[30] Numenius, fr. 11, 3f. des Places
[31] Numenius, fr. 11, 9-14. Cf. fr. 37, 13; 38, 1 des Places
[32] Numenius, fr. 12, 13-16 des Places

The caller then receives a charge of light (ἀκροβολισμοί) and comes into his own as a prophet. Unfortunately, though, this state of divine inspiration cannot last. When the god withdraws to continue his blessed existence, the mortal is suddenly plunged into darkness.[33] The vessel stands empty.

We recognise easily enough in this account a description of the phenomenon of divine possession. Falling into a trance, the prophet utters barely intelligible verses which those present (among whom one could possibly count Numenius himself, who gives such a succinct description of the theophoric-theurgic act in the philosophical idiom of the *Oracles*) write down on the spot.[34] But the illumination is intermittent, occurring over a period of several years, or even over decades. No doubt it can to a certain extent be provoked by the right attitude towards the physical and the metaphysical worlds; indeed, in a famous passage from the same treatise, where Numenius gives an account of the mystic union in language highly reminiscent of Plotinus', he points out that in order to reach such a state, one will need to make an enormous effort and to employ "a divine method" – οὐ ῥαδίας, θείας ... δεῖ μεθόδου.[35]

The stages of this "divine methodology" are further delineated by Iamblichus, who, in a number of complementary passages, specifies how the theurgist enters a trance by evolving from a state of frenetic activity to one of absolute passivity.[36] Of course Iamblichus is the great systematiser of theurgy, who turns ἐποπτεία into a teachable process, rationalising and compartmentalising it as an art, or as a technique comprising a number of echelons. In Numenius, on the other hand, we have a straightforward, if allusive, first-hand account of how revelation occurs, a sober and categorical report, free of all the technicalities and embellishments typically added by the ἐπίγονοι. Numenius states in no uncertain terms that the duration of divine possession is entirely in the hands of the vaticinating god;[37] and that he departs abruptly, without any warning, leaving his medium in a state of abject despondency.

[33] Numenius, fr. 12, 17-22 des Places

[34] Such was the case with Ismail Emre (1900-1970), an illiterate welder from Adana, to whom we owe more than two thousand songs of a distinctly theological hue: cf. Schimmel 337 and Athanassidi, "Ismail Emre ...".

[35] Numenius, fr. 2, 19f. des Places

[36] The relevant passages in the *De mysteriis* are the following: III 5 p. 111, 9-16; III 20 p. 149, 11-14; I 12 p. 41, 4-11 P. For a combined reading and analysis of these passages, cf. Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 42f.

[37] For the expression ὁ χρησμῳδῶν θεός, cf. Dam. Princ. I 155, 15 R. = II 106, 10 W. - C. (see n. 6).

3 The work: from revelation to Scripture

The sporadic outpourings of Julian the Theurgist, occurring in the manner described by Numenius, had to be put into writing, but not in the same way as the Orphic poems, products of simple theologians in which the commentary continually contaminates the divine message, or the Hermetica, in which the plurality of the exegesis is interwoven with the original instruction. In the case of the *Oracles*, *the gods had spoken* – a point emphasized by our philosophers – in order to provide a total revelation, a holy book to be preserved for all time *in its original form*. How could that be when the recording of the poet's pronouncements would naturally have resulted in several different versions of the revelation given to him by the Twice Beyond or Bel Hadad?

Parallel evidence in both space and time[38] suggests that, after he had finished his recitation, these variants were submitted to the Theurgist and, either by himself or more likely in collaboration with his father, he made the necessary amendments with a view to producing the authoritative text.[39] Even so, the final product, which was probably entitled Λόγια δι' ἐπῶν, must have been so obscure that the two Julians deemed it necessary to accompany it with a prose commentary.[40] It is at that moment that the text becomes closed for ever: at no point do the Neoplatonists mention variant readings or make corrections, as, for example, Porphyry does with the oracles in his *Philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*.[41] For this reason, I would suggest that any tampering with the text ceased with the death of the two Julians: from then onwards, the textual tradition would no longer be open to creative reproduction, the *Oracles* having been granted the status of a canonical book. And we may perhaps go on to speculate that, according to an ancient custom, the original copy of the Chaldaean revelation was deposited in the treasury of the temple of Bel at Apamea, thus conferring on the city an aura of special sanctity. This leads us to the third and most important step in our argument.

[38] See n. 34.

[39] Psellus (quoting Proclus) emphasizes the fact that, given the helplessness of a person in a state of trance, a witness in full possession of his faculties is needed in order to assist the prophet: ἄλλου πάντως χρεία τοῦ ἐφεστῶτος τοῖς κατόχοις καὶ νήφοντος, Orat. for.1, 331f. (des Places, Oracles p. 220, 22f.).

[40] For the title of a work called Λόγια δι' ἐπῶν and attributed to the Theurgist, cf. Suda I 434, II 642, 3 Adler. On the commentary by father and son, cf. Marin. Procl. 26, 17-19.

[41] Fr. 303F, 17-25 Smith.

The crucial piece of evidence linking the Apamean Bel with the *Chaldaean Oracles* seems to lurk behind the lines of a bilingual inscription on an altar to Bel in far away Vaison-la-Romaine.[42] Its dedicator, a certain Sextus, may well have been the father of the Emperor Elagabalus[43] (and therefore connected with the clan of Iamblichus),[44] but his identity is not the point at issue here. What opens up a truly fascinating field of speculation in our case are the key words of the two inscriptions.

> Ε[ὐ]θυντῆρι Τύχης Βήλῳ Σέξτος θέτο βωμόν
> τῶν ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ μνησάμενος λογίων. (IG XIV 2482)
>
> To Bel, the ruler of Fortune, Sextus has dedicated an altar
> in remembrance of the oracles at Apamea.

This statement of fact is complemented by the wish expressed (not necessarily by the dedicatee himself) in the Latin inscription on the opposite face of the altar:

> *Belus Fortunae rector mentisque magister*
> *ara gaudebit quam dedit et voluit.* (CIL XII 1277)
>
> Bel, the ruler of Fortune and lord of the *Nous*,
> will rejoice in the altar that Sextus has dedicated to him with all his heart.[45]

None other than the Twice Beyond of the *Oracles*, the Bel-Hadad of our two inscriptions is also described as *mentis magister*, "the lord of the νοῦς". This is not a random designation but a *terminus technicus* alluding to the hypostasis of the first god of the Chaldaean trinity as νοῦς πατρικός. Moreover, in both its Greek and Latin versions, the oracle includes an important allusion to the sacred topography of Apamea, where the temples of Bel and Tyche stood side by side on the marketplace: thus Bel's supremacy over the all-powerful Hellenistic goddess next door is proclaimed in no uncertain terms. What is of crucial importance to our argument, however, is the phrase τὰ ἐν Ἀπαμείᾳ λόγια, to my mind an allusion to the original copy of the *Oracles* deposited by the

[42] The altar is now at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, St Germain-en-Laye (MAN N° 11058).
[43] For a discussion on the identity of Sextus, cf. Balty 9.
[44] On the dynastic associations of Iamblichus, cf. Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 174-179.
[45] For a discussion of the grammatical peculiarities of the Latin inscription, cf. Veyne 276-279.

two Julians in the temple of Bel at Apamea, just as Heraclitus had presented his *magnum opus* in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus.[46]

It is against this background that one should view the fact that two significant philosophical figures deliberately chose to settle in Apamea – the Italian Amelius[47] and, even more significantly, the Chalcidian Iamblichus, who, on his return to Syria from abroad, moved to the city, clearly as the head of the circle (or school) which Amelius had bequeathed to his spiritual son, Hesychius Hostilianus. In Apamea, Iamblichus produced a systematic commentary on the *Oracles*, which continued to be studied and copied by his successors, as the evidence of the Emperor Julian and of Damascius, among others, demonstrates.[48] To all of these people, the indisputable author of the Chaldaean revelation was Julian the Theurgist (though the recurrent reference in their texts to 'the Chaldaeans' in this connection shows that they recognised the part played by the father in the production of the holy book). The prophet, however, was one man: Julian the Theurgist. Indeed, his fame as a seer and thaumaturge soon travelled beyond the charmed circle of the Platonists and came to challenge and even obliterate that of the most exemplary pagan holy men of late antiquity, Apollonius of Tyana, Apuleius and Arnouphis. Our attempt to reconstruct the milieu of the historical Julian can now be complemented by a search for the Julian of legend. Let us first examine how his myth was constructed, and then how it was disseminated.

4 The myth

Following the rules of the hagiographical genre, the author of Julian's *Vita* introduces us to his theme by reporting what preceded his hero's birth. This involved neither a dream sent to the parents nor the mother's visitation by a god or an angel, as in the case of, say, Alexander the Great or Jesus of Nazareth. The prehistory of Julian the Theurgist is uncommon, indeed unique, and one would not be mistaken if one conside-

[46] This was at least the late antique view: cf. Diog. Laer. IX 6. Two further indications pointing to the relation of the holy book of Platonism with the temple of Bel are the specific conditions of its destruction in 389 and the transfer to Apamea of a piece of wood allegedly representing one half of the cross of Christ: for an analysis of these two points, cf. Athanassiadi, *La lutte* 61-66.

[47] For traces of the OC in Amelius' works, cf. Saffrey, "Les Néoplatoniciens ..." 214.

[48] Jul. Ep. 12 p. 19, 2f. Bidez and Dam. Princ. I 86, 5f. R. = II 1, 7f. W. - C.

red it as a foreshadowing (or rather a rationalisation) of the birth of the *Oracles* themselves.[49] Terse, original, and potent, and thus eminently lending itself to memorisation, the story drives home important aspects of Chaldaean-Platonic cosmology and shows how theurgy operates within such a framework.

The cycle of the Theurgist's exploits must have taken shape in "the sacred hearth" of Apamea under Iamblichus' inspiration.[50] The wide and varied circle of aristocratic young men who gathered around him must have heard time and again, in addition to the impressive tale of the Theurgist's conception and birth, several others which emphasized not so much his supernatural powers as the fact that he had come into the world as the saviour of humanity at a particularly critical moment in its history. His task was to initiate through his theurgical methodology a universal road to salvation (the *universalis via animae liberandae* of Porphyry[51]), and at the same time to use his spiritual gift to alleviate human suffering. For the Neoplatonists, the benign nature of theurgy and the providential role of its practitioners in society can never be overstated. Free from the constraints of fate, as the *Oracle* proclaims,[52] the race of the theurgists is invested with a mission to combat evil in the world.

It was in the course of those convivial evenings celebrated by Eunapius, when the master regaled his wards with edifying stories and beakers of wine, and those long walks in the Syrian countryside, in the course of which Iamblichus was in the habit of performing miracles, that the mythology around the person of Julian the Theurgist would have been given its canonical form.[53] Several generations of pupils who had come to Apamea emerged into the outside world with a new identity which singled them out as members of a specific religious community – more than that, as the shock troops of a new religion with a salvationary mission. As teachers and spiritual guides, as statesmen and administrators, the disciples and the ἐπίγονοι of Iamblichus could be found everywhere, from the market place to the imperial court, disseminating their message through writing or by word of mouth, and occasionally by exercising their theurgical skills for the common good.

To give a few striking examples drawn from the prosopography of the first generation of pupils, the Cappadocian Aedesius brought Iambli-

[49] See above, p. 194f.
[50] Ps.-Julian Ep. 183, 448b p. 242 Bidez - Cumont.
[51] Fr. 302F Smith = Aug. civ. X 32.
[52] OC 153.
[53] Eun. VS V 1, 6 - 2, 9 p. 458-460 D. = 11, 18 - 15, 2 G.

chus' teaching to Pergamon, where he spread the school mythology generously among students and laymen alike.[54] One of the most exalted among Iamblichus' disciples, Julian by name, joined Licinius' court in Nicomedia, from where he sent a continuous series of adoring letters to "the saviour of Hellenism" in Apamea.[55] And Sopater,

> the most wonderful among Iamblichus' pupils on account of his lofty nature and greatness of soul, ... hastened to the imperial court, hoping to dominate and convert by his arguments the purpose and headlong policy of Constantine; and he attained such wisdom and power that the emperor was captivated by him and publicly made him his assessor, giving him a seat at his right hand.[56]

If this familiarity was eventually to cost Sopater his life, in the meantime the vast influence he exercised over the emperor through his mastery of the art of theurgy ensured that he took the leading role in the rituals and ceremonies for the foundation of the new capital.[57]

The "progeny" of Iamblichus (foremost among them, Proclus, according to the surviving sources) seems to be, if not the main channel, at least at the origin of the remarkable diffusion of the legend of Julian the Theurgist. Once launched, the myth took its own course, eventually shrouding the Theurgist's personality to such an extent that, faced with the intricacies of the evidence, modern scholars, instead of endeavouring to disentangle fact from fiction, have preferred to disregard the literary testimony, allocating the whole of the Julian tradition to the realm of myth. Yet by following as closely as possible the successive metamorphoses of a story which was widely broadcast in the Roman empire through all the media of official propaganda – coins, sculpture (the column of Marcus Aurelius), historiography and panegyric – we may perhaps come to understand how this happened and why. Let us first turn to the events themselves.

4.1 The rain miracle

In the summer of 172, Marcus Aurelius and his army were trapped in their camp on the Danube frontier by a Germanic tribe, the Quadi, with

[54] Eun. VS VI 1; VIII 1, 5-8 p. 461.481f. D. = 17, 8 -18, 13; 56, 20 - 58, 3 G.
[55] Ps.-Julian Ep. 184, 419a p. 247 Bidez - Cumont. For the identification, cf. Barnes.
[56] Eun. VS VI 2, 1f. p. 462 D. = 18, 14-23 G. (translation by W. C. Wright, slightly altered).
[57] Eun. VS VI 2, 3-12 p. 462f. D. = 18, 23 - 22, 27 G.

the sun beating down pitilessly on wounded and uninjured alike. Only a miracle could save the Romans from the disaster in which they had involved themselves, and a miracle duly occurred.[58] According to Cassius Dio, Arnouphis, an Egyptian magician in the emperor's retinue, attracted a torrential rainstorm through a fruitful invocation to the various deities, in particular to Hermes Aerius,[59] and more than 200 years after the event, the court poet Claudian was to attribute the salvation of the Roman army to a "Chaldaean magician".[60] In yet a third, later, version of the miracle, the assiduous reader and great admirer of Proclus, Michael Psellus, informs us that one of the many exploits of Julian the Theurgist during Marcus' Dacian campaign was the driving away of the barbarians from the Roman frontier. This he achieved by fashioning a human face out of clay and turning it on the enemy with the result that, when the Germans approached, they were dispelled by terrible thunderbolts.[61] As related by Psellus, this particular story has its origin in Proclus – himself a producer of rain by theurgical means – but the ascription of the rain miracle to Julian the Theurgist (firmly associated with Marcus Aurelius himself and not simply with his reign) has deeper roots which surface in the Suda notice dedicated to him. There, Julian usurps the deed of Arnouphis:

> They say about him that once, when the Romans were exhausted by thirst, he suddenly caused dark clouds to gather and discharge torrential rain with incessant thunder and lightning; and that Julian performed this through his wisdom. But others say that Arnouphis the Egyptian philosopher worked this miracle.[62]

Borrowed verbatim from the notice on Arnouphis in the same lexicon, the anecdote provides confirmation of the universal fame enjoyed by Julian in the tenth century. Whether the borrowing is due to the compilers of the Suda or to some later copyist, the conclusion is the same: by the Middle Byzantine period, Julian was so widely recognised as a benign magician that any famous miracle was capable of being attributed to him. Indeed, his reputation was greater than that of Apuleius, the prota-

[58] For the rain miracle cf. also Seng, *ΚΟΣΜΑΓΟΙ* 142-150.

[59] Dio 72, 8, 2-4. Marcus Aurelius' recourse to the supernatural during the Marcomannic war made a vivid impression on contemporaries and posterity alike: cf. Hist. Aug. Marc. Anton.13, 1.

[60] In addressing Honorius on the occasion of his sixth consulship, Claudian felt obliged to refer to the emperor's virtuous predecessor, Marcus Aurelius, as a possible source of the divine intervention as a result of his blameless life (VI Hon. 347-350).

[61] Op. phil. I 3, 142-147 (des Places, Oracles p. 222, 2-8).

[62] Suda I 434, II 642, 4 Adler. Cf. A 3987, I 365, 4 Adler.

gonist in a famous trial involving magical practices, and even of Apollonius of Tyana, the magician *par excellence* in the Byzantine imagination and the traditional rival of Christ.

A tale included among the *Questions and Answers* attributed to the famous seventh-century mystical master Anastasius Sinaita encapsulates this claim. With a blatant disregard for geography and chronology, this narrative tells how the Emperor Domitian, wishing to deliver Rome from a plague, has recourse to the know-how of three famous magicians, Apuleius, Apollonius of Tyana and Julian [the Theurgist]. The first of these promises to put a stop to the evil in fifteen days, while Apollonius gives a deadline of ten days. But Julian, after carefully explaining that the entire population of the capital would by then have perished, halts the plague on the spot.[63] As a revolutionary methodology of salvation, theurgy had greatly impressed even those who had no connection with the Platonic mysteries.

4.2 Fame and envy

Yet, like all recognised benefactors of mankind, Julian was also an object of the envy of his peers.[64] Thus, according to a story mentioned by Psellus (which seems to hark back to Porphyry), Apuleius is able to thwart an interview of the Theurgist with the seven-rayed god of the Chaldaean pantheon.[65] Another anecdote relating to the destruction of vermin in the fields, also preserved by Psellus, is in the same vein. Both Julian and Apuleius are experts in esoteric wisdom, but they differ in their methodologies: Apuleius is more material (ὑλικώτερος), whereas Julian achieves his purpose without recourse either to incantations or to amulets: his method is νοερωτέρα – more spiritual. Indeed, such is the power of his word that the sheer force of his *logos* can affect creation. As the fifth-century ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen, reports,[66] Julian once broke a stone into two by the sheer violence of his pronouncement (βίᾳ λόγου). The triumph of the Chaldaean holy man is complete, and it is recognised as such even by the enemy who is Sozomen. He is not simply

[63] PG 89, 525AB.

[64] Referring (after Porphyry) to a theurgical joust between Julian and an unknown magician, Augustine writes: *vir ad eadem* (theurgic skill) *potens tactus invidia* (civ. X 9 ad fin. and cf. X 10).

[65] Op. phil. I 3, 140f. (des Places, Oracles p. 222, 1f.); Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles* 286f.

[66] HE I 18. Cf. also Seng, *ΚΟΣΜΑΓΟΙ* 148f.

the ultimate authority in theurgy, that is, the expert in *working divine works*, but even more importantly, he is the commander of the *logos*, the spiritual master who effortlessly solves the gravest and the most mundane problems of his fellow men.

Let us conclude. The achievement of Julian the Theurgist in providing Hellenism with a holy scripture and the pagan communities with a methodology of divine ascent impressed faithful and infidel alike and was duly commemorated by both. The discipline of theurgy and its blessings for humanity were acknowledged universally, as is demonstrated by the wide circulation of legends connected not only with Julian the Theurgist, but also with many other practitioners of this art (such as the Emperor Julian, the hierophant Nestorius and finally Proclus himself).[67] If to the charmed circle of the Platonists Julian the Theurgist was the holy messenger of God, to the Christians he was the most successful and beneficent of all magicians. Thus to the question asked by the title of this paper: "man or myth?", the answer is: man *and* myth.

[67] Libanius Or. XVIII 177 (for Julian); Zosimus IV 18 (for Nestorius); Marin. Procl. 28. Proclus was convinced that he had the soul of Nicomachus of Gerasa, the hero of Iamblichus, in whose work we first encounter the term theurgy (Exc. 6 p. 277, 7 Jan; for an alternative reading see Tanaseanu-Döbler in this volume, p. 41 n. 124).

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XVIII

PERSECUTION AND RESPONSE IN LATE PAGANISM: THE EVIDENCE OF DAMASCIUS*

THE theme of this paper is intolerance: its manifestation in late antiquity towards the pagans of the Eastern Mediterranean, and the immediate reactions and long-term attitudes that it provoked in them. The reasons why, in spite of copious evidence, the persecution of the traditional cults and of their adepts in the Roman empire has never been viewed as such are obvious: on the one hand no pagan church emerged out of the turmoil to canonise its dead and expound a theology of martyrdom, and on the other, whatever their conscious religious beliefs, late antique scholars in their overwhelming majority were formed in societies whose ethical foundations and logic are irreversibly Christian. Admittedly a few facets of this complex subject, such as the closing of the Athenian Academy and the demolition of temples or their conversion into churches, have occasionally been touched upon;[1] but pagan persecution in itself, in all its physical, artistic, social, political, intellectual and psychological dimensions, has not as yet formed the object of scholarly research.

To illustrate the pressures wrought by intolerance upon late antique society, I have chosen a period of one hundred years spanning the life, testimony and initiatives of Damascius. In the 460s Neoplatonism as a fairly standardised expression of pagan piety still formed—despite occasional persecution—a generally accepted way of thinking and living in the Eastern Mediterranean; moreover, as epitomised by Proclus and Athens, it was a recognisably Greek way. By 560 on the other hand, as a result of Justinian's decree prohibiting the official propagation of the doctrine in Athens, its exponents, after various vicissitudes, had ended up in a frontier town, where their philosophy had become contaminated by local forms of thought and worship and was on the way to losing its Graeco-Roman relevance. The interaction and the resulting changes in late antiquity of a sociological force—intolerance—and of a *Weltanschauung*—Neoplatonism—is a complex phenomenon in which causes and effects are never clearly defined. In an attempt at clarifying this development (which lies at the heart of the transformation of the ancient into the medieval world) I have in what follows set the focus of the action against two contrasting backgrounds. The first consists of a selective study of violence in Alexandria between the fourth and the sixth centuries; the second is represented by an equally impressionistic account of the evolution of Neoplatonism at Harran between the sixth and the tenth centuries and its increasing relevance to the world of Islam.

I. *THE PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY*

By way of introduction to my theme I shall attempt to animate the gallery of believers presented by Damascius. Born in all probability in the early 460s in the city from which he

* I am most grateful to John Matthews and John Avgherinos for substantial criticism of this article, and to the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College who, by electing me to a Woolley Fellowship, enabled me both to travel widely in the Middle East and to work at leisure in Oxford.

[1] Recent bibliography on the closing of the Academy in H.J. Blumenthal, '529 and its sequel: what happened to the Academy?', *Byzantion* xlviii (1978) 369-85; I. Hadot, 'La vie et l'oeuvre de Simplicius d'après les sources grecques et arabes'; *Id., Simplicius: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie* (Berlin 1987) 3-39; A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora: results of excavations conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens XXIV: Late Antiquity A.D. 267-700* (Princeton 1988) 44-47, 84-92, together with B. Ward-Perkins, *JRS* lxxx (1990) 251. On temples, see J.M. Spieser, 'La christianisation des sanctuaires païens en Grèce', Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens, *Neue Forschungen in griechischen Heiligtümern* (Tübingen 1976) 309-20; G. Fowden, 'Bishops and temples in the Eastern Roman Empire, A.D. 320-435', *JTS* n.s. xxix (1978) 53-78.

derives his name,[2] Damascius studied in Alexandria, and seems to have taught rhetoric both there and in Athens. He belonged by right of birth to that charmed circle of holy men and literati, whose achievement and shortcomings he undertook to appraise for his own pleasure and for that of posterity in his *Life of Isidore*, a book which in the Suda, and occasionally in Photius, bears the much more felicitous title Φιλόσοφος Ἱστορία.[3] This splendidly irreverent hagiography was written in Athens in the first quarter of the sixth century, presumably shortly after Damascius became head of the Academy. Surviving in sadly fragmentary form, the work bears witness to the ease with which the members of a wide philosophical circle moved in the late fifth and early sixth centuries between Athens, Alexandria and Aphrodisias. Yet much more than a testimony to the physical and spiritual peregrinations of the pagan élite of the time, this text is a criticism of current opinion on the ideal philosopher:

> I have chanced upon some who are outwardly splendid philosophers in the multitude of views treasured in their rich memory; in the wondrous quickness of their crafty syllogisms; in the constant asset of their extraordinary power of perception; yet inside, in the things of the soul, they are poverty-stricken and lacking in true knowledge.[4]

This polemical point is specifically made in connection with Isidore. By a startling paradox, conventional mental abilities in him were so ordinary, that philosophy rested μόνῃ τῇ ψυχῇ, 'exclusively on his soul'.[5] Thus Isidore appears as the antipode of the much admired Asclepiodotus, whose claim to intellectual wholeness Damascius demolishes with cruel methodicality:

> Contrary to what most people think, Asclepiodotus' mind was not perfect. He was sharp at raising questions, but not so shrewd when it came to putting an argument together; his was an uneven intelligence, especially when it came to divine matters—the invisible and intelligible concepts of Plato's thought. Even more wanting was he in the field of higher wisdom, the Orphic and Chaldaean wisdom which transcends philosophical common sense. In natural philosophy, however, he was by far the strongest among his contemporaries. Likewise he was good at mathematics, and this is what gained him the reputation of an overall genius. In the sphere of morals and virtue finally he was constantly trying to innovate and to limit understanding to the realm of the visible, without taking any account of the theories of the Ancients, but packing together everything and degrading it to this mundane world.[6]

As must already be clear, Damascius was no charitable observer of human nature; he was a subtle psychologist, a cruel logician and, above all, a man endowed with a superb sense of the ridiculous. Yet if with all this mental impedimenta and a thorough training in rhetoric he did not end up as a compulsive spirit of contradiction, this is purely because of the spiritual conversion he underwent around his thirtieth year. Under the impact of this experience, Damascius gave up his rhetorical career to devote himself to philosophy.[7] His intuitive mind afforded him the means of penetrating the innermost recesses of transcendental mysticism and, as a result, he is the only Neoplatonist after Iamblichus to have produced a truly original work of systematic theology. But Damascius was a man of many parts. Not untypically, he also produced a collection of marvellous stories and a philosophical *Who's who*; at the same time

[2] For the date of Damascius' birth, see L.G. Westerink, *Damascius, Traité des premiers principes* I (Paris 1986) pp. x-xi.

[3] Suda, *s.v.* 'Δαμάσκιος' and Photius, *Bibl.* 181 (125b).

[4] Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, ed. C. Zintzen (Hildesheim 1967) *Epitoma Photiana* (henceforth EP) 17; for an extreme case along these lines, see EP 62 on Damascius' own master of rhetoric, Theon.

[5] EP 17.

[6] EP 126.

[7] See EP 201 together with Westerink (n. 2) pp. xiii-xiv; cf. Damascius, *Vita Isidori* (n. 4) *fr.* (henceforth fr.) 325.

he proved an intrepid traveller, an inspiring teacher, an able administrator and, when circumstances required, a leader of men.

In undertaking to write a prosopographical study of contemporary philosophy, Damascius was following a well-established trend. The surviving fragments may be enigmatic, but they leave one in no doubt of the style, intent and ambience of the original. The *Philosophical history* is no apologetic work. The air of doom which pervades Eunapius' *Lives* is absent here. This is a critical, and often humorous, appreciation of the character and achievement of individual men and women, judged as overall personalities. Set firmly against a wide geographical, historical and political background, these people are shown to move in two disparate and often clashing worlds, those of paganism and Christianity. That the two formed an organic unity is a fact of which Damascius, unlike many of his contemporaries, was vividly aware. Yet his art consists in his ability to clothe with objectivity the psychological world of other people. Space and Time too are prominent in this book. But, whereas all Space is viewed with a benign eye, as the perpetual theatre of divine revelation, Time, as the purveyor of decay, becomes for Damascius the villain *par excellence*. We are dealing with a typically Neoplatonic universe. The philosophers' private lives are firmly integrated into this metaphysical context, while at the same time they are inextricably linked with a sequence of events in local, imperial and international politics. Yet most of the actors appear only to a limited degree conscious of the public events around them; using a post-Euclidean image, I would describe their lives as running at different angles more or less parallel to the axis of imperial history, and when, not uncommonly, these men's perceptions clash with reality, the collision does not seem to wake them from their slumber. Gossip too is of the essence of this book. But Damascius is neither small-minded nor embittered. Contemptuous of most people, but never cantankerous in the manner of a Eunapius or a Zosimus, the author is also capable of tremendous outbursts of anger: the Christians and their view of Time, of Space and of the Beyond are his constant *bête noire*, the great negative theme which, more than any other force, cements these philosophic Lives together. All this material is presented in a superb linguistic garb, but what gives the text its unique grace is the style. At the risk of being accused of pretentiousness, I would describe Damascius' art as an unexpectedly felicitous combination of the apparently incompatible achievements of an Anatole France and a Proust.

II. Revelatory wisdom

By the mid-fifth century 'the purified philosophy of Plato'[8] had taken deep root in Athens. What *we* call Neoplatonism was the renovated paganism of the Hellenised Syrian, Egyptian or Arab, which combined an acceptance of all local cults with a moral, intellectual and spiritual teaching that was recognisably Greek.

The man who was instrumental in the creation of this pagan oecumenism was the Syrian Iamblichus who, in the conceptual sphere, sanctioned the dogma of the accordance of Plato and Aristotle and, on the practical level, established a Pythagorean model of behaviour for the Saint. Stoic, Peripatetic and Cynic ethics were nicely fitted into this framework, while a crucial Stoic notion, that of universal sympathy, was called upon to account for the unbreakable unity of the physical universe. Unity of space had its correlative in unity of time and, accordingly, Iamblichus' impressive synthesis embraced, justified and finally systematised whatever was known of humanity's religious past. All major theologies, whether Egyptian, Babylonian or Greek, with their cultic customs, their mythologies and their metaphysics, were explained as

[8] The phrase is used by Hierocles, *On providence, ap.* Photius, *Bibl.* 214 (173a *ad fin.*) to describe Neoplatonism.

facets of the same grandiose revelation, a revelation which—unlike the Judeo-Christian revelation—is a continuing, unending one. The particular expression of the divine word that provided Iamblichus with the theoretical basis for his religious system was a collection of hexameter verses revealed to humanity at the time of Marcus Aurelius and circulating under the name of Chaldaean Oracles.[9]

Iamblichus' achievement was universally acclaimed. In the following generations men set themselves the task of producing commentaries on the most metaphysical of Plato's dialogues and on the Chaldaean Oracles along the lines of exegesis established by Iamblichus. Gradually they even came to read only those dialogues which had been singled out by Iamblichus and in the order proposed by him.[10] Inevitably, his theological teaching came to acquire the aura of dogma and by the same token the criteria of orthodoxy and heresy were imported into pagan theology. The need for a holy book became imperative, and it was in this connection that the Emperor Julian declared the whole of Greek literature sacred.[11] But Julian was an enthusiast. Most people would regard as canonic scriptures only a very limited body of texts, as the testimony of Proclus in this respect shows: 'he used to say', reports Proclus' biographer, 'that if it were in his power he would have preserved only the Chaldaean Oracles and the *Timaeus*, destroying all other books' as positively harmful to humanity.[12] These words, with which, revealingly, Marinus concludes his teacher's biography, anticipate the various stories about the destruction of the Library of Alexandria and epitomise their spirit.[13]

The need for a pagan identity, created not least by Christian aggressiveness, gradually led the Neoplatonists not only to acquire an *esprit de corps*, but also to seek to define their roots, that is to present themselves as a group in synchronic and diachronic terms. The latter attempt resulted at some time in the fifth century in the evolution of the theory of the 'golden chain', professing belief in an unbroken succession of divinely inspired teachers, who both taught and practised the Platonic mysteries. Naturally the line started with Plato, though later Neoplatonists tended to attribute the birth of their doctrine to an almost mythical figure, the Egyptian Ammonius Saccas, master of the two most powerful geniuses of the third century—Plotinus and Origen. More concretely, however, Iamblichus came to be recognised as the founder of renovated Platonism, and Athens as its consecrated seat.[14]

From the early fifth century the Athenian Academy was a teaching centre in the physical, legal and spiritual sense, yet more importantly it was also moving towards becoming something

[9] For a brief and clear analysis of the importance of the Chaldaean Oracles within the context of Neoplatonism, see J.F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London 1989) 119-122. On Iamblichus, see my articles, 'Philosophers and oracles: shifts of authority in late paganism', *Byzantion* lxii (1992) 48-49 and 'Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: the testimony of Iamblichus', *JRS* lxxxiii (1993) 115-130. A good description of the aims of Iamblichan syncretism is given by Marinus with reference to Proclus: πᾶσαν μὲν θεολογίαν ἑλληνικήν τε καὶ βαρβαρικὴν καὶ τὴν μυθικοῖς πλάσμασιν ἐπισκιαζομένην (...) εἰς φῶς ἤγαγεν, ἐξηγούμενός τε πάντα ἐνθουσιαστικώτερον καὶ εἰς συμφωνίαν ἄγων: *Vita Procli* (henceforth *VP*) 22; for a slightly different emphasis, cf. fr. 134. For Asclepiades as an adept of the Iamblichan school of thought, see fr. 164.

[10] On the Iamblichan canon, see L.G. Westerink, *Anonymous, Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam 1962) p. xxxvii, as complemented by A.J. Festugière, 'L'ordre de lecture des dialogues de Platon aux Ve/VIe siècles', *MH* xxvi (Paris 1969) 281-96 and esp. 283 [= *Etudes de philosophie grecque* (1971) 535-550].

[11] See Julian's Edict on Education, *ep.* 61 (Bidez) and my *Julian: an intellectual biography*[2] (London 1992) 1-12.

[12] Marinus, *VP* 38. That this attitude was becoming standard among Neoplatonists is illustrated by the Alexandrian ascetic Serapio, who not only spent his life reading just Orpheus (fr. 41), but also made a point of bequeathing to Isidore 'the two or three books' that he possessed (fr. 287).

[13] For which, see A.J. Butler (ed. P.M. Fraser), *The Arab conquest of Egypt*[2] (Oxford 1978) 401-403.

[14] Marinus, *VP* 10; Hierocles, *On providence*, *ap.* Photius, *Bibl.* 214 (173a, 34 ff.; 172a, 1-9); cf. the important EP 150, where Iamblichus and Plutarch are pronounced in one breath.

of a monastic institution—a theological college, one might say, or a dervish tekke. In this capacity the school at Athens was unique in the later Roman world. There was at least one municipal chair of philosophy at Alexandria but, as Ilsetraut Hadot has conclusively argued, no Platonic School of Alexandria can ever have existed.[15] Recent research suggests that Aphrodisias too was a flourishing centre for Iamblichan studies at the end of the fifth century, though again there could have been no official Academy based there.[16] Throughout late antiquity Athens remained the only universally recognised dispenser of pagan theology, and to have been formed there was a *sine qua non* for those who subsequently taught either at Alexandria or at Aphrodisias. Relations between the three cities were close, but the certificate of orthodoxy could be conferred only by Athens.

Such is the picture conveyed by Damascius, who also offers the extremely interesting information that by the late fifth century men could be elected honorary *diadochi* of the Academy. This was undoubtedly so in the case of Isidore, a man who attached great value to personal independence. Accordingly 'he was elected a *diadochus* of the Platonic interpretation in title rather than actual deed'.[17] This election *honoris causa*, as I understand it, must have meant that, while remaining a freelance *diadochus*, Isidore was officially recognised as forming a link in the golden chain of Plato. And it was typical of Damascius' independence of mind and peculiar sense of humour that, upon receiving the Platonic succession, he made a point of writing the Life of Isidore rather than that of his own predecessor, Zenodotus. Indeed by canonising Isidore's unconventionality, Damascius both complied with School tradition and made slight fun of it.[18]

III. The sacred race

If not everybody could form part of the 'golden chain', there were at least other symbolic chains which attached men to heaven.[19] For the Neoplatonist, we are all divine and the meaning of life consists in taking consciousness of this inherent divinity. The discovery of God is thus a journey within, in which the point of embarkation coincides with birth. It is there that some people are more fortunate than others, for the degree of awareness of one's divinity is determined by heredity. In a society in which political propagandists had raised the principle of imperial legitimacy to a metaphysical level, the Neoplatonists came effortlessly to evolve and spread a dynastic theology. Indeed by the time of Damascius, the history of the caste had acquired its own mythology as well, for the creation of which all sorts of forged genealogies were mobilised.[20]

[15] Evidence for the existence of a municipal chair in Alexandria is provided by Damascius who says that, after her husband's death, Aedesia succeeded in ensuring for her sons the revenues of the chair ἕως ἐφιλοσόφησαν, fr. 124. On the metaphysical importance of the Athenian succession, EP 151. For a general appraisal, I. Hadot, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin; Hiéroclès et Simplicius* (Paris 1978) 10-12 and, more recently, *id.* (n. 1) 7.

[16] See C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in late antiquity* (London 1989) pp xxv-xxvi, 85-87. On the issue of an 'Academy' at Aphrodisias, see the cautious analysis of the building complex which housed the philosophers' portraits by R.R.R. Smith, 'Late Roman philosopher portraits from Aphrodisias', *JRS* lxxx (1990) 130; cf. *id.* 'Late Roman Philosophers', R.R.R. Smith-K.T. Erim (eds), *Aphrodisias Papers* ii (1991) 144-6.

[17] EP: καί ἐψηφίσθη διάδοχος ἐπ' αξιώματι μᾶλλον ἢ πράγματι τῆς πλατωνικῆς ἐξηγήσεως.

[18] This point becomes even clearer in the light of the first half of Section IV.3.

[19] For a good presentation of the relevant material, see P. Lévêque, *Aurea catena Homeri: une étude sur l'allégorie grecque* (Paris 1959) *passim.*

[20] Theodora, the pupil of Isidore and of Damascius and the inspirator and dedicatee of the *Philosophical history*, is presented as the linear descendant of Iamblichus and, beyond him, of Sampsigeramus and Moninus, priestly kings of Emesa, Photius, *Bibl.* 181 (125b): cf. *JHS* cii (1982) 49 n. 128, to which add the evidence of Strabo xiv 2.10; for the evolving ethos of the royal house of Emesa and its increasing connection with philosophical mysticism, see K.

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The oecumenism of Neoplatonic theology had its social pendant in a matrimonial cosmopolitanism. Except for those, not so few, who chose to preserve ritual celibacy,[21] the members of the 'sacred race' married cultured women actively committed to the pagan cause, preferably relations of their masters and fellow-students.[22] As a result of this marital policy, women moved between continents just as easily as men, a circumstance which enhanced conformity and cohesion.

The sense of belonging to a caste was promoted in various ways, all of which suggested that legitimacy was a matter of spiritual rather than blood kinship. Thus the terms 'father' and 'grandfather' were regularly used to refer to one's masters, while children named after their parents' teachers served as living reminders of the fact that spiritual ancestry counted more than carnal.[23] The dedication of books, the leaving of legacies, the pronouncement of funeral speeches and the writing of biographies defined in subtle ways spiritual linkage in a community which described philosophy as its 'ancestral inheritance'.[24] This attitude meant that, whether clever or stupid, all children had to embark on a philosophical career, increasingly viewed as a battle station the defence of which passed from father to son.[25] 'One could call us fighters', wrote Syrianus somewhat out of context while commenting on Aristotle's Metaphysics, 'since we defend the best and most beautiful of philosophies from the charges brought against it'.[26] To leave one's station and go over to the Christians was an act of desertion, as the technical verb αὐτομολῶ used by Damascius in connection with Horapollo's conversion signifies.[27] It meant no less than exchanging a life of chastity and happiness, 'the Cronian life', whose foundation was reason, for 'a totally dissipated existence, corrupted by lust and wantonness, low-minded, full of female prejudice, a cowardly life roaming about in all manner of swinishness, mean and petty, a life running after the servitude of security, wholly abject and weak, counting happiness solely by the measures provided by one's belly and pudenda, incapable of doing anything noble even for a second; like an enervated body, thrown in a corner

Buraselis, 'Syria, Emesa and the Severans. Political ambitions and Hellenistic tradition in the Roman East', Ο Ελληνισμός στην Ανατολή: Acts of the First International Archaeological Congress at Delphi, 6-9 November 1986 (Athens 1991) 23-39. Theagenes of Athens, who was connected through marriage with Nestorius and Plutarch, appears as the descendant not only of a score of Homeric heroes but also of the victor of Marathon, Miltiades, ?Pamprepius, *Panegyric*, E. Heitsch, *Die griechische Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Göttingen 1961) 119, 30 ff. See also the Stemma at the end of the article.

[21] Fr. 34 (for Sarapio); fr. 124 (for Proclus); not unlike Plotinus, Proclus chose to remain unmarried and look after other people's families ὡς κοινός τις πατὴρ: Marinus, *VP* 17.

[22] Olympiodorus offers to his star pupil, Proclus, the hand of his daughter, who was brought up φιλοσόφως (*VP* 9); Aedesia, a close relative of Syrianus and a saint, marries Hermias, after Proclus declines her (fr. 124).

[23] Chrysanthius of Sardis called his son Aedesius, after his master: Eunapius *VS* xxiii 5.1; Proclus refers to Syrianus as 'father': *In Tim.* ii 253, 31; iii 35, 26; *In Remp.* ii 318, 4; *In Parm.* vii col. 1142, 11; cf. *ibid.* iv col. 1058, 22: Πλούταρχος, ὁ ἡμέτερος προπάτωρ, and *VP* 29. Isidore named his son Proclus (EP 301). In the generation after Proclus there is a philosopher called Syrianus, who may well be a brother of Hegias (EP 230); Isidore is called by Damascius θεῖος πατὴρ (fr. 1). For a schematisation of the dual linkage that connected men in our circle, see the attached Stemma.

[24] The orthodoxy of Asclepiodotus was put beyond contest when Proclus dedicated to him his Commentary on the *Parmenides* (*In Parm.* I, col. 618, 18); Sarapio left his possessions to Isidore to whom he was not related (fr. 287); at a very young age Damascius recited a *laudatio* in verse at Aedesia's funeral (fr. 125); at Proclus' funeral Isidore was the censer-bearer (EP 187). After her husband's death, Aedesia expected her sons to enjoy philosophy καθάπερ κλῆρόν τινα πατρῴας οὐσίας (fr. 124).

[25] Fr. 121: on Hermeias' dullness of mind; fr. 115: on Theon, a teacher of Damascius!

[26] *In Met.* (Kroll), 91, 8 ff. The frequent experience of law-courts (cf. Eunapius *VS* vi 10.2) naturally exacerbated the manner of the Neoplatonists: Isidore is a litigious man (frs 62, 65); fr. 66 describes him as ἐνστατικός, EP 30 as φιλαίτιος. Christian aggression had contaminated the pagan psyche to such an extent that by Damascius' day the philosophers were expected to write only for polemical purposes or in defence: EP 8.

[27] Fr. 317.

like a sack, incapable of movement'.[28] For the Neoplatonist, such and even baser was the life of his contemporaries, for 'they had pulled down and trailed on the ground the divine that is in us and imprisoned it in the earthly and accursed, the Giant-like or Titanic gaol'.[29]

As well as an undisguised reference to Christian revelation, this passage contains all the key-words of pagan polemic. In the language of the Neoplatonists, the Giants and the Titans are the Christians—mythological beasts with only the external characteristics of Man, who during their brief passage on earth choose to be ruled exclusively by passion.[30] In Athens in particular this slogan carried a strong dose of wicked topicality, as it could be seen to allude to the very symbol of the New Order, the palatial residence of the emperor or his representative. Erected, it would appear, by the apostate empress Athenais-Eudocia for the use of her brother Gessius, the building dominated the Agora, where all philosophical activity occurred.[31] And the visual inescapability of its Tritons and Giants—the sea and land monsters which adorned its monumental façade—must have given rise to an inside joke based on the slanderous identification of Christians with archaic monsters.

Yet pagan hagiographical literature is not just a string of embittered attacks; it is also permeated by the Messianic belief that ultimately the Christian leaders will meet the fate of the Homeric Giant Eurymedon, 'who ruined his reckless people and perished himself'.[32] Then the realm of reason will be established again and Hellenism will spread as far as the utmost confines of the civilised world.[33] In the meantime, however, one has to be brave and discreet. This is why 'the sacred race lived apart, leading the blissful life which is pleasing to the gods, devoted to philosophy and to the worship of the divine beings'.[34]

IV. The Claims of Orthodoxy: Theory and Practice

1. *Holy sites*

Just as, whether they had a vocation for it or not, the offspring of the sacred race had to embrace philosophy, so too they saw it as their duty to write religious poetry. Proclus dedicated hymns to the traditional Greek and Roman gods,[35] but also, complying with Iamblichan orthodoxy, to Marnas of Gaza (whom Bishop Porphyry had a few years before deprived of his sumptuous abode)[36] to the Arab Theandrites (whose temple at Ezra was shortly destined to be emphatically converted into a Christian church)[37] and to Isis (whose cult at Philae was to continue undisturbed until the time of Justinian).[38] Isidore too felt constrained to compose

[28] Fr. 30a; cf. the language of Proclus, *In Remp.* i 75, 15-16: ἀφίστασθαι μὲν τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῆς ὄντως ἱερᾶς θρησκείας, φέρεσθαι δὲ εἰς τὴν ἐμπαθῆ καὶ ἀλόγιστον ζωήν. On the κρόνιος βίος, see EP 22, frs 33, 287 etc.

[29] Fr. 32.

[30] See e.g. Proclus, *In Remp.* i 74, 12-16; ii 176, 14.

[31] On the Palace of the Giants, see Frantz (n. 1) 95-116; for the plausible assumption that it was built by Eudocia, G. Fowden, 'The Athenian Agora and the progress of Christianity', *JRA* iii (1990) 497-8.

[32] Eunapius *VS* vi 11.2 and *Odyssey* vii 59-60.

[33] The conviction that divine providence cannot allow the Christians to destroy this universe forms a major theme of Neoplatonic literature, cf. Salutius, *De diis et mundo* xviii; Hierocles (n. 1), 214 (172b).

[34] EP 95.

[35] See the surviving hymns, edited with commentary by E. Vogt (Wiesbaden 1957).

[36] For what follows, Marinus, *VP* 19; for the importance of Gaza for the Neoplatonists, fr. 186; for the destruction of the Marneion, Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 69.

[37] On the Syrian Theandrites/Theandrios, EP 198; cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in late antiquity* (Cambridge 1990) 18; on the conversion of the temple at Ezra into a church of St. George, *OGIS* 610.

[38] For Isis and Philae, see below, n. 189.

religious hymns, though certainly no Muse had touched him with her grace, as his pupil and biographer irreverently remarks.[39] But a saying that Proclus never tired of repeating must have impressed the young man, namely that 'it is becoming for the philosopher to worship not just the gods of one city or even of one nation, but to be the hierophant of the entire world'.[40]

For the entire world is sacred. While all space is divine, however, some places are more numinous than others; caves and groves, springs and meteorites[41] have been known since time immemorial as sites and manifestations through which God communicates more effortlessly with Man. As such, these inherently sacred places have formed focuses of worship, locations where God reveals Himself even to the layman through miracles and wonders. Living in a period of growing persecution, the Neoplatonists naturally felt the need to protect these holy spots from pagan indifference and Christian attack.

One way in which this purpose was achieved was through commentary and exegesis. Beginning with Porphyry, the Neoplatonists wrote consciously and copiously for an educated and a general public alike, interpreting at various levels the sacred myths of paganism and at the same time justifying ritual in both the local and metropolitan traditions.[42] An optimistic thought-world, which considered all Nature as the realm of revelation and all literature as holy, naturally regarded folk-lore as the repository of divine mysteries. Thus the theologians of Neoplatonism collected and systematised popular tales in an attempt to reveal and spread the spiritual truth lurking behind the veils of extravagance and incongruity.[43] We know for instance that in a now lost work, Damascius presented 572 marvellous tales of jinns and miracles.[44] Reading the relevant note in Photius, one cannot escape the impression that in this collection one would have come across several of the stories contained in the *Thousand and one nights*, though possibly told in a different spirit. With the same didactic intention Damascius dealt with the marvellous and the fantastic in his *Life of Isidore*, where old Egyptian folk tales, contemporary miracles and holy places are inextricably linked together to illustrate the unity of the universe, which even in its sensible form and historical manifestation is filled with beauty and delight.[45]

A more straightforward way in which the Neoplatonists sought to promote their optimistic view of Nature and History was by spending money on their holy places. In tune with an ancient tradition of civic patriotism still alive as a powerful ideal in their social milieu, the

[39] EP 61; literature in general bored Isidore, EP 35, 85—a regard in which Asclepiodotus was more successful, fr. 209; cf. fr. 164 (on Asclepiades); fr. 348 (Damascius on the Phoenician Asclepius).

[40] Marinus, *VP* 19.

[41] Βαίτυλος (= meteorite, ensouled stone) is a word possibly coined by Damascius (fr. 203, cf. EP 94 for βαιτύλιον) as a phonetic rendering of the Hebrew *byt'l*, house of God.

[42] This practice was initiated by Porphyry and taken to its logical conclusion by the Emperor Julian (see my *Julian* [n. 11] 132 ff.); cf. EP 213 for Isidore. For a theoretical justification of this position, see Proclus, *In Remp.* i 75, 16 ff. In his recent book (n. 37) Bowersock presents Hellenism as a cultural *koine*, which allowed the voice of local traditions to become fully articulate in the Roman empire. By using iconographical evidence and philological argumentation, the author shows how Greek culture delivered the ethnic cults, especially in Syria, from their parochialism — religious, cultural and linguistic — without adulterating their essence.

[43] For Damascius' programmatic declaration, EP 2: εἴσω δὲ ἡ τοιαύτη σοφία κρυπτομένη ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τῆς μυθολόγου ταύτης ἀληθείας, οὕτως ἠρέμα παραγυμνοῦται κατὰ βραχὺ τῷ δυναμένῳ πρὸς θεὸν ἀνακλῖναι τὴν ἱερὰν αὐγὴν τῆς ψυχῆς. Cf. EP 213.

[44] Photius, *Bibl.* 130 (96b-97a).

[45] EP 63, 68, 69, 87, 88, 93 (for the popular Egyptian background, cf. G. Lefebvre, 'Le conte des deux frères', *Romans et contes égyptiens de l'époque pharaonique* (Paris 1949) 139), EP 140, 203.

Neoplatonists put their financial resources at the service of the pagan cause.[46] Asclepiodotus the Younger for one was ruined 'on account of his pious inclinations',[47] and certainly anyone who has recently visited Aphrodisias would find this proposition more than credible. Complying with more general policy, the Alexandrian philosopher, who in his youth 'could not bear even to offer sacrifices,[48] had to suppress his anti-ritualistic tendencies and lead a campaign aimed at the restoration of pagan cult throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and not least in his native Alexandria.[49]

A third way in which the men of our circle defended the *loci* of paganism was by visiting them. Restlessly moving from place to place, these spiritual tourists encouraged the locals in the exercise of their ancestral religious customs and at the same time drew inspiration for themselves.[50] At a time when he was evading persecution at Athens, Proclus spent a year in Lydia; there, at Adrotta, he revived a local cult and made at least one convert, young Pericles, who eventually followed him back to Athens.[51] Of even greater interest to us is the expedition which brought Damascius himself and his master Isidore from Alexandria to Athens through Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. This journey, which lasted eight months, appears as a pagan version of the pilgrimage of Egeria. Despite the rigours of bad weather and difficult terrain, despite the hostility of government officials, who created great difficulties for them, the two men were able to visit the most important holy sites on the way.[52] And, once in Aphrodisias, they were welcomed by Damascius' old tutor, Asclepiodotus, who organised for them physical and mental excursions into the sacred. From Aphrodisias Damascius visited the Phrygian Hierapolis in the company of another philosopher, Dorus. During the night he spent there he dreamt that he had become Attis and that, at the instigation of the Mother of the Gods, he was celebrating the feast of *hilaria*, a clear symbol, Damascius thought, that he and his companion had been saved from spiritual death. On his return to Aphrodisias, Damascius told his host how he had descended into the sacred cave of Apollo without suffering any harm from its poisonous exhalations. Asclepiodotus then regaled his guest by narrating an analogous miracle which had occurred to him when he visited the site as a young man.[53]

It was presumably during the same visit that Asclepiodotus decided to take Damascius to see the miraculous statue of Apollo in another sacred cave in Caria at a location just across the Maeander called Ἀπόλλωνος Αὐλαί.[54] Carried away by their religious enthusiasm, the two men did not wait for the boat to take them across, but threw themselves into the river. Submerged by its strong currents, they were soon under water and death by drowning seemed

[46] Fr. 186 (on Antonius); fr. 273 (on Theagenes and Archiadas); fr. 351 (on Hegias); it was in the course of the fifth century (κατὰ τοὺς νεωτέρους χρόνους) that the Academy acquired its huge fortune through donations; fr. 265 and EP 158.

[47] Fr. 189.

[48] Fr. 202.

[49] Fr. 204.

[50] On spiritual tourism, see fr. 38 (= EP 239) in connection with Sarapio: προθυμότατος εἰς ἀποδημίαν οὐ τὴν μάταιον καὶ τρυφῶσαν, εἰς ἀνθρώπινα οἰκοδομήματα καὶ μεγέθη καὶ κάλλη πόλεων διαχαίουσαν. Cf. fr. 94 (Asclepiades visiting Baalbek).

[51] Marinus, *VP* 15, 29, 32, 36.

[52] EP 206-220. I agree only partly with the reconstruction of the journey proposed by M. Tardieu (*Les paysages reliques: routes et haltes syriennes d'Isidore à Simplicius* (Louvain 1990)), who inexplicably excludes Asia Minor from the itinerary of the two men. My description of their journey (which I have recently attempted myself) is to appear in my forthcoming translation of Damascius' *Philosophical history*, partly in the Introduction and partly as Commentary.

[53] EP 131.

[54] For the identification of the site, see L. Robert, *BCH* ci (1977) 86.

imminent. It was at that point that, emerging for a moment and catching sight of King Helios, Asclepiodotus muttered a secret spell. The charm wrought its effect and, seconds later, the two men were lying on the riverside, exhausted but alive.[55]

If such miracles were not uncommon in late pagan circles, they tended to occur inside temples or in their vicinity. This is why the Neoplatonists defended these buildings often at the cost of their lives. And, as we shall see, Damascius' manner of speaking about Olympius—the philosopher who led the defence of the Serapeum against Christian attack in 391—is indicative of his approval of such an extreme attitude.[56]

2. *The meaning of asceticism*

Yet, however sacred, this world of the senses is largely illusory to the Neoplatonist. Its beauty is allusive, its divinity hidden; being is concealed from perception by the tides of becoming. In such a world any dynamic manifestation of the divine—what these men called a theophany—is an extraordinary event, a miracle. And what produces miracles is Man's empathy with God, which can only be achieved by purging the soul of its demonic elements. For the Neoplatonist, therefore, miracles are not wrought through the technical expertise of the magician, who knows how to manipulate the forces of Nature, but through the purity of the ascetic.[57]

Both Plotinus and Iamblichus had defended this position and illustrated its validity by personal example. Yet theirs was a tolerant asceticism, a personal pattern of behaviour which they did not seek to impose on others; their circles were unhomogeneous gatherings and each of their pupils profited from their teaching to the extent of his own ability and will. This was no longer the case in Proclus' circle, or even in Plutarch's, where we first come across the claims of an institutionalised asceticism.[58] Here *obedience* and conformity in practical and spiritual matters were the cardinal virtues required by the pupil;[59] accordingly young men were scrutinised 'as gold in fire' before being accepted into the philosopher's room.[60] If admitted, their gastronomic and sexual continence together with their intellectual and emotional discipline was proclaimed to the world by the special garment of the novice. When Isidore arrived from Alexandria at this semi-monastic community, 'Proclus ordered [him] to adopt the symbols of the best life and wear a coarse cloak', an order that the balanced Isidore found excessive, though in the end he complied with it,[61] as he realised that in the rigid atmosphere of the Athenian Academy no deviations from the norm in practical or intellectual matters would be tolerated and that any individualistic tendencies would be decisively curbed.[62]

These norms of behaviour were valid not only inside the philosopher's classroom. Virginity was a paramount ideal in these circles and the only excuse for forfeiting it was the requirements of procreation; upon realising that he was not destined to have children, the philosopher

[55] EP 116-117. For Neoplatonic miracles, see *i.a.* Eunapius *VS* v.2 (Iamblichus); Libanius, *or.* xviii 177 (Julian); Marinus, *VP* 29 and fr. 271 (Proclus).

[56] Frs 91-97; cf. below, 22-25. The defence of temples against Christian attack was not an uncommon feature among the "ἑλληνισταί"; cf. Sozomen vii 15.11; John Chrysostom, *ep.* 123.

[57] On this theme, see my 'Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: the testimony of Iamblichus' (n. 9).

[58] The practice of communal life at the Academy had been Plutarch's wish, cf. Marinus *VP* 12, 29.

[59] EP 150.

[60] Fr. 135.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] On individualistic tendencies, EP 150: μηδ' αὖ μεῖζον φρονεῖν τῆς κοινωφελοῦς προαιρέσεως. On eating taboos, EP 125, frs 218, 227, 228. Hilarius was rejected by Proclus as a pupil on account of his appreciation of the pleasures of sex, EP 266.

Theosebius told his wife that she was free to marry another, but she replied that she could not imagine a happier existence than the one freed from the servitude of sexual intercourse; when one of the richest men in Aphrodisias married his daughter to the Alexandrian Asclepiodotus, he made a point of dressing the bride in a philosopher's rough garment. Such anecdotes, and the complacency with which they are reported by our sources, illustrate the overall attitude of these circles towards the body and its joys.[63]

3. *The tyranny of dogma*

Asceticism's corollary in the mental sphere was orthodoxy. Indeed it is not difficult to see how the need for an orthodoxy emerged among people who lived in a society that was becoming more Christian every day. Intolerance is built into the very presuppositions of Judeo-Christian thought and, accordingly, the triumph of Christianity raised intolerance of other creeds to the level of a religious and social ideal. Infected by the new ethos, the Neoplatonists strove for a few generations towards making their creed as monochrome as possible until Proclus, that scholastic saint who gave the Academy its monastic tone, arrived and equated Platonism with Iamblichan teaching, as *he* understood it.[64]

Among Proclus' intimates was one Domninus, a Syrian 'whose life was not impeccable in the way a true philosopher's life must be'. But the sin for which he incurred Proclus' wrath was that 'he perverted many of the doctrines of Plato by introducing his own beliefs'. Proclus immediately published a refutation with the characteristic title *Purificatory treatise of the Platonic doctrine*, and Domninus, who at some point in his career had been elevated to the chair of Plato, was struck off the list of *diadochi*.[65] His *damnatio memoriae* on account of his heretical views was complete and the language used by at least one of his successors, Damascius, harsh and scornful.[66]

Much more revealing though of the atmosphere of intellectual terror that reigned in the Academy is the experience of the Samaritan Marinus. An un-selfconfident man with fragile health and a rather literal mind, Marinus had the succession more or less thrust upon him on Proclus' death. Terrified by so great an honour, he tried to acquit his duties as best he could; he thus began by composing a lengthy commentary on the *Philebus*, which he took to his star pupil, Isidore, asking for a detailed criticism prior to publication. After a careful reading, Isidore's polite remark was that Proclus' commentary on the same dialogue was quite sufficient. On hearing this Marinus destroyed the manuscript.[67] A little later, the hapless but persistent *diadochus* felt obliged to tackle the quintessentially metaphysical dialogue *Parmenides* but, as his pragmatic mind was incapable of any intuitive leaps, he produced a pedestrian interpretation, one at variance with Neoplatonic orthodoxy, which claimed that the dialogue dealt with species rather than gods. Isidore, to whom Marinus sent a letter expounding his argument, refuted it point by point and made it clear that 'the only true exegesis of the dialogue was the more divine one'. The reason why Marinus did not destroy this manuscript as well is extraordinarily interesting: Proclus had once dreamed that Marinus would indeed produce a commentary on the *Parmenides*.[68]

[63] Cf. EP 59, on Theosebius; EP 262, on Asclepiodotus. For the circle's theoretical attitude to sex, EP 167, fr. 12 (on Isidore), fr. 102 (on Hypatia), fr. 174 (on Heraiscus). Faithful to the ideal of virginity, Proclus turned down two excellent brides, as Marinus approvingly reports (*VP* 9, 17).

[64] Fr. 134. Both Proclus and his followers misunderstood Iamblichus: cf. my 'Dreams' etc. (n. 9) *passim*.

[65] Fr. 227. For a different view on Domninus, see fr. 221.

[66] *Ibid.* and fr. 228. On the School's Iamblichanism, EP 33, 36. On contemporary abuse of Iamblichus, EP 34.

[67] EP 42 (= fr. 90).

[68] Frs 244, 245.

This Platonic brotherhood with its regimented way of living and thinking was, as already pointed out, the expected product of a world which had endorsed intolerance. Narrow and illiberal, it aspired towards what Damascius had described in another context as 'the servitude of security'. It was an emotional haven for the weak, and one which combined the excitement of modernity with the authority of tradition as well as being socially exclusive, mentally demanding and spiritually satisfying. Above all, it afforded its members the convenience of a label. For all these reasons formal conversions to Neoplatonism were not uncommon.

If the abbot of the Platonic Academy, Marinus, was initially a Samaritan,[69] Iacobus Psychristus, the iatrophilosopher and philanthropist in whose honour the Athenian Academy and the Constantinopolitan Senate erected statues, was, to judge by his name, a convert from Judaism. More to the point, Damascius introduces two Alexandrians, Epiphanius and Euprepius, priests of Osiris and Aion and of Mithra respectively, who were born into Christian families. When the two men, says Damascius, were initiated into the mysteries of paganism by the traditional élites, they became ardent heralds—πολύφωνοι κήρυκες—of the new theology.[70]

Of course most conversions to paganism occurred within an institutional framework. It was in this connection that a systematic proselytiser like Horapollo was nicknamed by the Christians 'Psych-apollo', 'Soul-destroyer'.[71] But even a compromiser like Ammonius could make converts, almost *malgré lui*.[72] The social tension created by such conversions needs hardly any commentary, especially as the newly illuminated usually chose to proclaim their new allegiance to the world in pretty histrionic and entertaining ways; as for example the Alexandrian Zeno, who broke away from his native Judaism by driving a white ass through the Synagogue on the Sabbath.[73]

V. Persecution and survival

If Athens was the intellectual factory of late paganism, Alexandria was its main religious warehouse. Indeed, one expression of the awakening Egyptian nationalism was a conscious return to the roots of religion. In that ancient land, which had fascinated the Greeks long before Plato's day, culture and religion had always been co-extensive. For that reason when a new religious mode emerged, it could only be accepted if seen in traditional cultural terms and, accordingly, Christianity became the driving force behind the tremendous revival of the national language and art in late antique Egypt. At the same time, either as a response to the Christian challenge or under its own momentum, Hellenism, which had for centuries enjoyed a formal connection with the local religion, was at last blessed with the intimacy of union. It was as if an arranged marriage, which had for years vegetated in the tepid embrace of convention, was miraculously immersed into the whirlpool of passion.[74] In a masterly article R. Rémondon has shown that the paganism of the philosophers in fifth century Alexandria was not an anachronism born of intellectual snobbery, but a vital movement with multiple roots in popular religion.[75]

[69] EP 141.

[70] Fr. 100; *pace PRLE* ii, *s.v.* Epiphanius 2, ἀρχαιοπρεπὴς πολιτεία in this context can only mean paganism.

[71] See Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vie de Sévère* (ed. trans. M.-A. Kugener), *Patrologia Orientalis* ii (1907) 32.

[72] *Id. De mund. op., PG* 85, 1012: ἠρέμα πρὸς ἑλληνισμὸν ἀποκλίνας.

[73] Fr. 239.

[74] EP 1; fr. 3.

[75] R. Rémondon, 'l'Egypte et la suprême résistance au christianisme (Ve - VIIe siècles)', *BIFAO* li (1952) 63-78; cf. fr. 80 (= EP 243). On Egyptian 'nationalism' and the slow Hellenisation of Egypt as a reaction to Rome, see the pertinent remarks of M. Sartre, *L'Orient romain* (Paris 1991) 454-8.

1. *Violence in Alexandria*[76]

In the late 350s Alexandria experienced one of her most anti-pagan bishops in the person of the Arian George. Thrust into the see of Athanasius, George had recourse to every imaginable method of eradicating pagan cult.[77] An arrogant and provocative man when circumstances permitted it, but normally sly and servile, he converted temples into churches, organized public parades in which pagan sacred objects were ridiculed, deliberately insulted the pagans during the exercise of their worship and, finally, unleashed the army against the quintessentially symbolic temple of Egypt, the Serapeum.[78] Not content with mere monumental aggression, George then turned to human persecution, causing the exile of influential teachers, such as the pagan iatrophilosopher Zeno.[79] Not surprisingly, therefore, as soon as it became known that Julian was sole emperor, a large crowd sought George at the prison where he had been confined for his own safety and, after ritually torturing him, tore him limb from limb, burnt his remains and threw the ashes into the sea. The operation escalated into a riot in which, among other atrocities, many Christians were crucified.[80] When the incident was reported to the emperor, Julian addressed a letter to the Alexandrians, which, in the words of its editor, cannot have created the impression 'd'une colère très dangereuse', and sought to ensure for himself possession of George's considerable library.[81]

After this peak of violence peace between the two communities was restored and freedom of worship was resumed in the city which 'on account of the temple of Sarapis was a sacred world in itself'.[82] The reference is to the Rhacotis Serapeum, though the temple of Sarapis at Canopus was no less famous. Situated some twelve miles to the east of Alexandria, Canopus had since Hellenistic times been an international oracular and healing centre, a meeting place of intellectuals and saints and, more unpleasantly, a popular tourist resort.[83] At the same time it held, in accordance with Egyptian custom, a community of men who had dedicated themselves to divine worship. At some moment in the second half of the fourth century there arrived at Canopus a remarkable holy man. Antoninus was the son of the philosopher Sosipatra and seems to have inherited from his mother both her prophetic and paedagogic gift and her unusual will-power in dealing with the demands of the passionate self. His fame spread quickly; indeed it was thanks to him that the Serapeum became again a major centre of pilgrimage.[84] As the years passed, however, Antoninus grew into a hieratic and remote figure increasingly consumed by one main concern:

[76] Ὁ Ἀλεξανδρέων δῆμος πλέον τῶν ἄλλων δήμων χαίρει ταῖς στάσεσιν· εἰ δέ ποτε καὶ προφάσεως ἐπιλάβηται, εἰς ἀφόρητα καταστρέφει κακά': Socrates vii 13.2.

[77] On George's personality, see E. Stein-J.R. Palanque, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* i (Paris 1959) 153 and my *Julian* (n. 11) 23-4. Cf. Sozomen v.7; τῶν περὶ τὰ ξόανα καὶ τοὺς ναοὺς ὕβριν καὶ τὴν τῶν θυσιῶν καὶ πατρίων κώλυσιν.

[78] Socrates iii 2; Ammianus xxii 11.7; Julian *ep.* 60, 379a: εἰσήγαγεν εἰς τὴν ἱερὰν πόλιν στρατόπεδον, καὶ κατέλαβεν ὁ στρατηγὸς τῆς Αἰγύπτου τὸ ἁγιώτατον τοῦ θεοῦ τέμενος.

[79] Libanius *ep.* 171; Julian *ep.* 58.

[80] Stein-Palanque (n. 77) 164-5.

[81] Julian *ep.* 60; cf. L'empereur Julien, *Lettres*, ed. J. Bidez (Paris 1924) 43; Julian *epp.* 106, 107.

[82] Eunapius *VS* vi 10.8.

[83] Strabo, xvii 1.17, talks of a string of inns, and of masses of tourists who grossly misbehaved themselves (μετὰ τῆς ἐσχάτης ἀκολασίας).

[84] Eunapius *VS* vi 9.15-17; vi 10.6-10.

he predicted to all his disciples that after him the temple would be no more, but that the great and holy temples of Serapis would pass into formless chaos and lose their shape, while an abominable mythological darkness would hold tyrannical sway over what is fairest on earth.[85]

Antoninus' obsessive repetition of these words coincides with the late 380s, a period which saw the initiation of a ferocious anti-pagan campaign in Alexandria. Early in 384 there arrived in Egypt the new praetorian prefect of the East, Maternus Cynegius, a Christian fanatic if ever there was one, who had express orders from Theodosius to prohibit pagan worship and close the temples.[86] It was in the course of a second visit to Alexandria, however, in 385-6, that Cynegius seems to have embarked on his mission, especially as he found an ideal ally in the person of the new bishop, Theophilus (385-412).

Born and bred in Memphis, Theophilus had had first-hand experience not merely of the awesome splendour of the ancient religion but equally of its tenacity and vigour.[87] His prolonged contact with paganism inspired in him a fierce hatred, comparable only to the fury he felt towards Alexandria's other major achievement: the legacy of Origen. And the attack on paganism and Origenism (which is the most Platonic form of Christianity) became the twin issue to which he consecrated his episcopal skills.

Relying on his armies of monks and with administrative backing, Theophilus unleashed a formidable attack on pagan monuments.[88] According to the combined testimony of Socrates and Sozomen, he destroyed or converted into churches several temples and had their sacred objects paraded in a feast of derision.[89] These sacrilegious acts provoked the wrath of even the most philosophical among the Hellenes, who then proceeded to attack the Christians. In the heat of the battle the pagans occupied the Rhacotis Serapeum, which was situated on the acropolis of the city, and turned it into a fortress. A holy war of untold savagery ensued; the pagans raided the city and brought their prisoners to the Serapeum, where they gave them the choice between sacrificing to the gods and death by torture. The powers-that-be proved unable to control the situation and the emperor's assistance was sought. Theodosius' order was to leave unpunished the pagans of Alexandria (in whom he saw prospective converts), but to demolish the temples.[90] In this new phase the resistance of the Serapeum was organised by Olympius, a philosopher who, not unlike Antoninus, had come specifically from Asia Minor to Alexandria in order to serve the god.[91] He too was an adept of that *religio mentis* of which the Hermeticists speak and, as the Christian mob attacked the Serapeum, he urged his followers to die for the cause of religion; but, when he perceived their distress at the massive destruction of one of the most splendid buildings of antiquity, he explained in a moving speech that the symbols of religion are mere matter and that God is within.[92]

These events occurred in 391. Subsequently Theophilus' monks overran the Canopus

[85] Eunapius *VS* vi 9.17.

[86] For the date of Cynegius' arrival in Egypt and the reliability of Zosimus' information, see Zosimus iv 37 with Paschoud's note *ad loc.*

[87] For the bishop's personality and politics, see A. Favale, *Teofilo d'Alessandria* (Turin 1958) *passim.*

[88] *Apophthegmata Patrum, PG* 65, 200A; ἦλθον ποτε πατέρες εἰς Ἀλεξάνδρειαν, κληθέντες ὑπὸ Θεοφίλου τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου, ἵνα ποιήσῃ εὐχὴν καὶ καθέλῃ τὰ ἱερά.

[89] Socrates v 16: ὁ Θεόφιλος παντοῖος ἐγένετο καθυβρίσαι τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων μυστήρια. Sozomen vii 15: ἐπίτηδες σπουδάζων ἐνυβρίσαι τοῖς ἑλληνικοῖς μυστηρίοις, ἐξεπόμπευεν ταῦτα.

[90] This may be the occasion which prompted *C.Th.* xvi 10.11, and Sozomen's words (*loc. cit.* in n. 89) may be a free rendering of the spirit of the law.

[91] Fr. 91; fr. 97: Olympius held the presumably formal post of ἱεροδιδάσκαλος. Possible evidence for dedicating oneself to a god as a common attitude among philosophers is provided by EP 252.

[92] Echoes of this famous speech reached both Sozomen (vii 15) and Damascius (frs 93-94).

Serapeum,[93] while they helped to convert the nearby temple of Isis into a church of the Evangelists.[94] Despite Theophilus' efforts, however, the influence of the goddess at Menuthis outlived him and it fell on his nephew Cyril, whom Theophilus carefully prepared as his successor, to deal with the matter. Cyril contrived to have an oracular dream in which an angel entrusted him with the mission of translating the relics of the obscure martyr Cyrus from St Mark's Church in Alexandria to the newly founded Church of the Evangelists at Menuthis.[95] Joined by the no less obscure martyr John, Cyrus was intended to take over the therapeutic function of Isis, as Cyril explained in three successive addresses at the inauguration of the cult.[96] Whether Κῦρος was chosen because of the phonetic affinity his name offered to Κυρά, as Isis was commonly known, one cannot tell; but at Menuthis we have a typical case of religious transference, in which even the healing methods used by the pagan cult were perpetuated by the Christians.[97] Indeed Abba Cyrus continued to serve the Islamic community as a doctor so well that eventually the place was renamed 'Abukir' after him.[98]

As a sequel to the events of the 390s, Isis retreated to a private house at Menuthis, Olympius sailed to Italy, and the most notable among the defenders of the Rhacotis Serapeum dispersed all over the empire spreading the news of the siege, defence and final destruction of this potent symbol of pagan belief. Two of the most prominent among the defenders of the Serapeum were Ammonius, priest of Thoth-Hermes, and Helladius, priest of Ammon-Zeus; they both settled in Constantinople as grammarians and acquired great fame as teachers and scholars. Helladius, on whom uncommon imperial honours were showered,[99] left a truly lasting impression on his pupils: very often, turning aside from the quirks of Greek grammar, he would launch himself into a story of tears and violence, telling his religiously mixed audience how during the Serapeum riot he killed with his own hands no less than nine Christians.[100] The number of the victims, we may safely guess, grew with each telling. Olympius, on the other hand, the exceptionally good-looking and eloquent philosopher,[101] was busy mythologising the events in Italy, though in less self-centred fashion.[102] He used to relate Antoninus' apocalyptic vision, and so successful was he in spreading his fame as a prophet, that Augustine himself felt obliged to take some action: while recognizing Antoninus' prophetic gifts, he tried in his *de divinatione daemonum* to belittle them by contrast with those of the Prophets of Israel.[103]

More importantly, however, the prophecy of the saint of Canopus found its way into that curious and patchy translation of the Hermetic *Perfect Discourse*, the *Asclepius*. The much discussed eschatological section of this text contains an exposition of the principles held by

[93] The literary, papyrological and epigraphic evidence for and from Canopus-Menuthis is collected by André Bernand, *Le Delta égyptien d'après les textes grecs* i 1 (Cairo 1970) 164-257. For a lively description of the events, see Eunapius *VS* vi 11.2-6.

[94] That was at Menuthis, less than a mile's distance from Canopus; the temple of Isis may have been totally destroyed by the Christians (cf. EP 71-73 and Zacharias, *V.Sev.* 19).

[95] Cf. Sophronius, *Laudes in SS Cyrum et Johannem* 27, *PG* 87.3, 3413.

[96] *PG* 77, 110-1105.

[97] See N.F. Marcos, *Los Thaumata de Sofronio: contribución al estudio de la incubatio cristiana* (Madrid 1975) 22 n. 25.

[98] Though the relics of the martyrs were translated after the coming of the Arabs, first to Constantinople and then to Rome, Menuthis remained a centre of pilgrimage, and underground Christian worship may never have ceased: cf. P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient* (Paris, 1985) 318-9.

[99] *C.Th.* vi 21.1.

[100] Socrates v 16.

[101] EP 49, fr. 92.

[102] Sozomen vii 15.

[103] Augustine *div. daem.* i 6.11.

Antoninus and Olympius on the topic of ritual,[104] refers to the conversion of temples into churches (for which the standard Neoplatonic slander-word *sepulchrum* is used),[105] and finally alludes to the anti-pagan legislation of the 390s.[106] If one makes allowance for the clichés proper to the apocalyptic genre, the text appears as a dramatized, though fairly accurate, description of the events of 391 in Alexandria and its suburbs. Those who emerged victorious out of the confrontation are described as Egyptian in language only, not at heart—a clear reference to Christians, whether they are Greek or Coptic speakers.[107] An exuberant cosmic optimism, free from the slightest Gnostic shade, is coupled with a typically Neoplatonic Messianic profession of faith. It is of course not possible to prove that Olympius and his milieu are responsible for all this, but the suggestion does not rest merely on intuition: the themes of the *Asclepius* Apocalypse are so neatly shaped that they leap into place by themselves to form the peculiar pagan jig-saw puzzle known from late antique Alexandria. Indeed Olympius' fame at home and abroad grew so much that he soon became interchangeable with Antoninus in the pagan subconscious, so that by the fifth century the Alexandrians attributed to him the prophecies which had made famous his Canopus counterpart.[108]

Predictably, rather than arresting hostilities, the Serapeum issue initiated a period of constant brutality in which the persecuted became more arrogant and often unnecessarily provocative. A typical case is that of Hypatia, the minor Neoplatonic philosopher who dared stand against Cyril.[109] Confident in her assets, personal and social, Hypatia made an incessant show of power, preaching the doctrines of philosophy even in the streets of Alexandria. This attitude did not go unanswered for long and in 415 a Christian crowd dealt with her much in the manner in which George had been treated half a century before.[110]

The appalling cruelty of her public martyrdom, heightened by the factor of her sex, left an indelible impression on the Alexandrians. If Hypatia's fate gave rise to a legend, it also deterred the young from studying philosophy.[111] So long as Cyril was in power, pagans kept a low profile; for he proved a cruel and systematic persecutor of their creed. Indeed one of the tasks for which he will be remembered—not least because it immortalises the text it professes to destroy—is a voluminous formal refutation of Julian's *Contra Galilaeos*, dedicated by the bishop

[104] Cf. *Asclepius* 24, 25 with Eunapius' and Sozomen's respective accounts of Antoninus' and Olympius' views on ritual: ἐπεδείκνυτο μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν θεουργὸν καὶ παράλογον εἰς τὴν φαινομένην αἴσθησιν (Eunapius *VS* vi 9.7); ὕλην φθαρτὴν καὶ ἱνδάλματα λέγων εἶναι τὰ ἀγάλματα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἀφανισμὸν ὑπομένειν· δυνάμεις δέ τινας ἐνοικῆσαι αὐτοῖς, καὶ εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀποπτῆναι (Sozomen vii 15).

[105] *Asclepius* 24: tunc terra ista sanctissima, sedes delubrorum atque templorum, sepulchrorum erit mortuorumque plenissima.

[106] *Ibid.*: quod est durius, quasi de legibus a religione, pietate, cultuque divino statuetur praescripta poena prohibitio; *Asclepius* 25: 'et capitale periculum constituetur in eum qui se mentis religioni dederit, nova constituentur iura, lex nova' can be seen as a specific reference to *C.Th.* xvi 10.6 (20.2.356). It is worth pointing out that *C.Th.* xvi 10.11 (16.6.391) was addressed to the Count of Egypt. On common-sense criticism of recent attempts to understand the Apocalyptic passages of the *Asclepius* in the light of reports on Unambal cultural despair, see R. Lane-Fox, *JRS* lxxx (1990) 238.

[107] *Asclepius* 24 *ad fin.*

[108] Fr. 97: οὕτω δὲ ἦν ὁ Ὀλύμπιος πλήρης τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὥστε καὶ προεῖπε τοῖς ἑταίροις, ὅτι ὁ Σάραπις ἀφίησι τὸν νεών.

[109] EP 164: ὁ Ἰσίδωρος πολὺ διαφέρων ἦν τῆς Ὑπατίας, οὐ μόνον οἷα γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἷα γεωμετρικῆς τῷ ὄντι φιλόσοφος.

[110] See Socrates vii 15 and frs 104-105; J.M. Rist, 'Hypatia', *Phoenix* xix (1965) 214-25, reaches rather strange conclusions as regards the causes of Hypatia's murder.

[111] Fr. 276.

to Theodosius II.[112] A more or less permanent campaign of ridiculing the sacred teachings of the Neoplatonists was simultaneously launched,[113] and this painful attack on the core of philosophy through its religious symbols seems to have further fired Egyptian nationalism and steeled Neoplatonic resistance. It was indeed in the course of the fifth century that the tables were unequivocally turned: because of her many sacrifices, Alexandria, 'the city of foreigners', was at last vindicated in Egyptian eyes and was even viewed as the very epitome of Egyptianism.[114]

It was in this atmosphere that Isidore grew up. He belonged by birth and leaning to the 'sacred race' and his masters, who were well versed in 'the Egyptian mysteries', vaccinated him with an enthusiastic belief in the indivisibility of the religious and the philosophical way. He himself became in turn an inspired teacher and, despite the element of terror still hanging over Alexandria, he enjoyed large audiences drawn from the wider intellectual circles of the city.[115] Success had a positive effect on him. He continued to 'philosophise unhindered'—by Christian malice, one assumes—'till the Panopolitan misfortune occurred'.[116]

2. *The strategies of survival*

Before telling the story of the man from Panopolis, it would be helpful to look at the ways in which the Neoplatonists sought to secure toleration for paganism or even to reverse the religious tide. Their political activities as members of the civic élites are well known. This was traditional and expected behaviour along lines established centuries before Christianity became a social threat. A less obvious field in which the pagan intelligentsia fought its battle was that of high politics—imperial and international—and in this regard pagan behaviour was just as novel, original and progressive as their notion of sanctity, their attitude to cultural heritage and the actual expression of their metaphysics.

As a man well acquainted with Roman politics, Damascius punctuates his cultural history with the main attempts at a pagan restoration.[117] He begins his story with Julian and ends it with his own teacher and fellow-citizen, Severianus, who taught him rhetoric 'not in a technical sophistic spirit, but in the wise philosophical manner'.[118] Severianus stayed in his pupil's memory as a man who was 'holy to the core and a Hellene'.[119] In his youth he had burned with the desire to study philosophy, but his father insisted that he studied law instead and followed a public career. After his father's death, Severianus went to Athens and studied under Proclus for a time, though in the end he fulfilled his father's ambition and joined the imperial service.[120] As governor, he led a conspiracy against the Emperor Zeno with the specific intention of reviving paganism, but he was betrayed and had a narrow escape. Whether before or after the discovery of the plot, Zeno seems to have offered Severianus the praetorian prefecture of the East on condition that he converted to Christianity.[121]

The emperor's offer is indicative of the atmosphere which prevailed in the upper layers of

[112] *PG* 76, 504-1058.

[113] EP 77.

[114] For some rabidly anti-Greek feelings, see the Oracle of the Potter, L. Koenen, *ZPE* ii (1968) 178-209; for the eventual change in attitude, Rémondon (n. 75) *passim*.

[115] Fr. 276.

[116] Fr. 286.

[117] EP 290.

[118] Fr. 282.

[119] Fr. 304.

[120] Fr. 278.

[121] Fr. 305.

the administration: cultured bureaucrats like Severianus, who happened to profess openly pagan beliefs, were not actively persecuted in normal times, but pressure was brought to bear on them. Intolerance in such cases took the sly shape of psychological coercion.

From the late 460s to the mid-480s the pagan communities lived through an exciting period of hope and expectation. This collective state of mind is faithfully mirrored in what survives of the *Philosophical history*, which in this respect is very much a pagan counterpart of ecclesiastical history. The pivotal figure of the early years is the *graecus imperator* of the West, Anthemius (467-472), who appears as a devout and militant pagan.[122] The philosopher Severus, a consul and a patrician whom the emperor made prefect of Rome, is presented as the leading spirit of an abortive pagan revival,[123] while, more unexpectedly, Damascius emphasises the link between Anthemius and Marcellinus, the autonomous governor of Dalmatia. As a cultured and practising pagan, a friend and patron of philosophers and a competent military leader, Marcellinus was a favourite of the emperor who conferred on him the patriciate.[124]

The close relations that Marcellinus entertained with members of Proclus' circle are an eloquent comment on the political and social cosmopolitanism of the circle;[125] more importantly though, they illustrate the determination of the Neoplatonists not to leave unexploited any channel through which power might trickle. One is reminded in this regard of the historian Olympiodorus of Thebes, a prominent figure in imperial politics and a scholar connected by personal and professional links to the Blemmyes of Nubia. This cultured pagan missionary dedicated his historical work to Theodosius II and was in turn the dedicatee of Hierocles' *De Providentia*.[126]

This network of connections is revealing of the strategies dictated by pagan ambition. Moving at the upper end of a social order which they despised and adulated at the same time, the Neoplatonists sought to foster international alliances. It may be that in their optimistic moments they let themselves be carried away by the dream of a restored pagan empire: a new Julian, helped by pious barbarian tribes, would seize power and the Giants and the Titans would disappear for ever into Tartarus.[127] The fragility of this dream is of course illustrated by the fate of Hierocles himself, who was arrested in Constantinople and even flogged in the courts. He gathered into the hollow of his hand, says Damascius, some of the blood that was running from his body and, throwing it over the judge, exclaimed: 'there, Cyclops, drink this wine, after having devoured the flesh of men'.[128] The Homeric line uttered by Hierocles was not chosen at random; drawing on the Scriptures of Hellenism, the men of our circle had evolved a code language which, as has already been pointed out, further sustained their sense of identity in the deeply barbarised world in which they felt that they were living.

Characteristically Hierocles was sent into exile and, even more characteristically, he was allowed to return to Alexandria and resume his teaching in order to prepare a new generation

[122] EP 108.

[123] *Ibid.*

[124] Frs 157-159.

[125] Fr. 145 together with fr. 159.

[126] See the classic article by J.F. Matthews, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes and the history of the West (AD 407-425)', *JRS* lx (1970) 79-97. For an account of the traditional and intimate link between the pagans and the Blemmyes and for the myth of the noble savage, to which the Blemmyes gave rise among Neoplatonists, see Rémondon (n. 75) 73-77.

[127] On this important theme, see R. von Haeling, 'Damascius und die heidnische Opposition im 5. Jahrhundert nach Christus', *JAC* xxiii (1980) 82-95.

[128] Fr. 106 and *Odyssey* ix 347.

of *païens engagés*.[129] These men, whose activities are reported by both a Christian and a pagan hagiographical text, were absorbed in the business of shaping a new generation of fighters with an enthusiasm verging on the fanatic, when in 482 Pamprepius—a pagan who had several years before been rejected by the Athenian members of the charmed circle[130]—arrived in Alexandria. In Damascius' view, Pamprepius was a dark, oily, presumptuous and remarkably ugly Egyptian, whose literary and diplomatic talents had enabled him to ingratiate himself with Illus, the only capable man in the entourage of Zeno.[131] Before openly revolting and proclaiming Leontius emperor, Illus had retired to the East and from there he was conducting his campaign on the diplomatic level. It was in this context that Pamprepius arrived in Egypt 'with an impressive retinue and an incredibly haughty air', invested with the double mission of rallying the Chalcedonians and the pagans to Illus' cause.[132]

The man's vulgarity horrified the Neoplatonists who pronounced him 'Typhon-like, yea an even more complicated beast than Typhon himself and even more puffed up with arrogance'.[133] The majority of pagans, however, were carried away by Pamprepius' flamboyant manner and believed in his prophecies. Something of this enthusiasm filtered through to the influential pagan community of Aphrodisias, where many people had recourse to divination in order to assure their compatriots that Illus' revolt would be crowned with success, that 'the moment had at last come when Christianity would break down and disappear, while paganism would be victorious'.[134] But things turned out very differently: in the autumn of 484 Illus and Leontius were defeated in battle near Antioch and fled to the Isaurian fortress of Papirios, where they held out for another four years. Pamprepius however was almost immediately executed by Illus, who had at last lost patience with him.

The Neoplatonists' outright condemnation of Pamprepius affords a comment on both the moral standards and the social ethos of the circle. The leading philosophers would not entrust the cause of paganism to the hands of a character as unscrupulous as Pamprepius; and nobody, either in the centre or on the periphery of the charmed circle, would dream of associating with a person of such striking vulgarity. Yet the most important reason for Damascius' strident tone against what he calls 'the Panopolitan misfortune' is to be sought elsewhere.[135]

As soon as the revolt was crushed, an imperial envoy by the name of Nicomedes arrived in Alexandria with the express order to break up the pagan circles. On his arrival, he proceeded to invite the philosophers for an interview, an invitation which they seem to have ignored. This arrogance enraged Nicomedes,[136] who arrested Agapius, a well known iatrophilosopher who belonged to the inner circle, and a few others, and had them brought before him for interrogation.[137] The enquiry seems not to have been a very civilised affair, but the

[129] EP 54.

[130] Frs 288-289 and Malchus fr. 20, Müller *FHG* iv 131-132 (= Blockley fr. 23).

[131] Frs 178-179 (on Pamprepius); Stein-Palanque (n. 77) ii (1949) 9, 28-31 (on Illus and his revolt); EP 172.

[132] *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* viii (ed. Cumont) (1922) iv, 224: μετὰ πολλῆς δορυφορίας καὶ πολλοῦ τύφου.

[133] Fr. 287; τυφώνειος (cf. EP 110). In Egypt Typhon was the very personification of evil, whether within the soul or without; for evidence see *Corpus Hermeticum* iv (Paris 1954) 77 n. 23.

[134] Zacharias *V. Sev.* 40 and frs. 294-295.

[135] Fr. 286; cf. fr. 178 *ad fin.*: ἡ μὲν οὖν εὐδαιμονία τούτου (...) πολλῶν αἰτία ἀτυχημάτων γέγονε τῇ πολιτείᾳ. Despite his political importance (μέγιστον ἤδη δυναμένῳ), Pamprepius is treated as a social inferior by Salustius, as Damascius delightedly reports: fr. 148; cf. fr. 300.

[136] EP 190.

[137] Frs 330, 331, 277.

philosophers showed courage and perseverance.[138]

The persecution of individuals was complemented, as usual, by an attack on pagan monuments in and around Alexandria. At the same time, incited by adroit preaching and assisted by bands of monks, the crowd searched and sacked the houses of important pagans; whatever idols were found were ceremoniously burned, while the crypto-pagan Prefect of Egypt, Entrechius, was required to enforce the imperial law.[139] Behind most of these activities was the Monophysite Bishop of Alexandria, Peter Mongus, whom Damascius understandably describes as 'a reckless rascal'.[140] Peter succeeded in staging a protest against the militant pagan Horapollo, which resulted in the closing down of his school of rhetoric. In churches all over Alexandria thousands of imprecations were launched at the Sunday liturgy against Psychapollo, the Soul-destroyer. The grammarian was duly arrested together with his uncle, the philosopher Heraiscus. Both were tortured to make them reveal the names of other co-religionists, but 'they gnashed their teeth and did not succumb to the tyrant'.[141] When eventually they were released, Horapollo was forced to leave Alexandria and Heraiscus had to go into hiding, seeking refuge in the house of the doctor Gessius who may have been a Christian baptised for reasons of convenience.[142] Damascius praises the courage of Gessius who hid a man wanted by the emperor himself, and dwells on the details of the burial of Heraiscus who ironically died soon after becoming the guest of one of late antiquity's most famous doctors.[143] As the philosopher Asclepiades was burying his brother according to the ritual befitting an Egyptian priest, the shroud was suddenly bathed in light and hieroglyphics appeared on it as well as the symbols of those gods in whose company Heraiscus' soul was now dining.[144] A martyr on earth, Heraiscus had found his place in heaven as a blessed saint.

As Damascius watched men's reactions to the Great Persecution, he spontaneously classified attitudes and passed judgements on human conduct. That adversity, for example, could turn ordinary men into heroes was something that he discovered at the time, not least by observing the behaviour of his own younger brother, Julian.[145]

Yet if Damascius approved of martyrdom and praised the fighting spirit of men like Heraiscus and Hierocles, he was very far from equating flight with cowardice. For Damascius was a pragmatist. Moreover he was an intuitive man, able to grasp the spirit in which people acted. Fleeing danger, rather than resorting to acts of useless heroism, was an attitude illustrated by his own master, Isidore, a man of principle, brave but realistic, full of optimism and good humour.[146] During the persecution Isidore sought refuge in young Damascius' house and then

[138] EP 190: ἀλλ' ὅμως οἱ φιλόσοφοι καρτερεῖν ᾤοντο δεῖν καὶ τὰ συμβαίνοντα φέρειν εὐλόφως.

[139] For the above and most of what follows, Zacharias *V.Sev.* 19-35 and R. Herzog, 'Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis', *Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums, Franz Joseph Dölger ... dargeboten* (Münster 1939) 117-124.

[140] EP 170; cf. EP 178.

[141] Frs 314-315.

[142] Sophronius, *Mir. Cyr. et Jo.* 30.2 (on his crypto-paganism). Gessius was so important a figure on the late antique intellectual scene that his academic witticisms were repeated by his students' students (Stephanus of Athens, *Commentary on Hippocrates' Aphorisms* (Westerink) II.53, *CMG* xi 1.3.1 (1985) 256), while more than a hundred years after his *floruit* Sophronius felt the need to invent an exemplary story of Christian conversion on his behalf (*mir.* 30), cf. fr. 335.

[143] Fr. 334.

[144] Fr. 174.

[145] Frs 319-320; EP 185.

[146] EP 38; 177.

sailed away.[147] While hiding he had the courage and decency to do what he could to protect other members of the community;[148] and when he decided to leave (in all probability when his 'contact' with the other philosophers was caught and gave away his master's name), he had the incredible sang-froid to gather his possessions together, as if he was preparing for a journey in normal times.[149] If eccentric in daily life, Isidore was a man of principle when it came to ideological issues. Thus his attitude to the Christians was one of firm contempt: 'he found them absolutely repulsive as being irreparably polluted, and nothing whatever could constrain him to accept their company; neither fabulous wealth nor exalted social position nor great political power nor a tyrant's malignity'.[150]

Just like his master, Damascius found the Christians despicable and those of his co-religionists who chose to convert to Christianity for whatever reason repellent. This was his attitude to Horapollo, whose case is worth comment, for it affords us a direct insight into the psychology of a passionate man who was also one of the protagonists of the fight for paganism in Alexandria. His uncle, Heraiscus, who had brought him up, had died in the persecution and his own father and teacher was also dead. The fortunes of his professional and domestic life thus seemed to combine against any hope of peace and happiness. All that was left to him was a wife, with whom he had been brought up, the daughter of Heraiscus himself. One day this wife and cousin deserted him and together with her foreign lover—ὅτε ξένου ὄντος—she sailed away from Egypt. Then, while Horapollo was in Alexandria, possibly in gaol, she returned secretly to their home in Upper Egypt and removed whatever she could from the household. Not content just with portable objects, she searched everywhere for a hidden treasure and for this purpose she even removed the floors of the ancestral home. Embittered by this further act of the adulteress, Horapollo took her to court.[151] By now Zeno and Peter Mongus were dead and the pagans in Alexandria were given a short respite, so that Horapollo could live without fear. Yet the pressures on him had been too many; and the mockery implicit in his appalling betrayal by a wife of impeccable pagan pedigree and upbringing must have struck at the very core of his belief.[152] It was at that point that he broke down and converted to Christianity (as his uncle Heraiscus had foretold) 'without any apparent necessity forcing him to do so'.[153] Damascius, who makes this comment, also adds 'he chose to go over to the other side of his own free will, probably in the hope of satisfying his greedy nature, for I cannot off hand think of any other reason'.[154] The consideration that as a co-religionist he was likely to be favoured by the judge who was to look into his case clearly appeared to Damascius too low a motive for a man to sacrifice his religious beliefs. But this is not the point. Horapollo's combative spirit had been worn away by a psychological war of attrition which lasted for too long. This failure of nerve was an all-too-common response to Christian intolerance. Yet, whether the conversion to Christianity was genuine or simulated,[155] spontaneous or the result of fatigue or coercion,

[147] Fr. 321; EP 187.

[148] Fr. 314.

[149] EP 181, 186.

[150] Fr. 19.

[151] See the text of Horapollo's prosecution as edited and commented upon by M.J. Maspero, 'Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien', *BIFAO* xi (1914) 163-194.

[152] I owe this suggestion to the Anonymous Reader of my paper for the *JHS*.

[153] Fr. 317.

[154] *Ibid.*

[155] A palm on a body in late antique tombs in Saqqara was a sign of crypto-paganism (J. Schwartz, *Qasr-Qārūn/Dionysias* (Cairo 1948) 28 n. 7). See also Ch. Guignebert, 'Les demi-chrétiens et leur place dans l'église antique', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* lxxxviii (1923) 65-102.

it lent itself to only one interpretation: that of open defeat.

Damascius registers a fourth attitude to persecution: rather than engaging in a desperate battle, avoiding the enemy or going over to his side, men could try to come to terms with their persecutor. This was the option that the philosopher Ammonius took when he approached Peter Mongus (or possibly his successor, Athanasius II) and entered negotiations with him clearly in the interest of his fellow-philosophers.[156] To Damascius, who when confronted with a similar situation forty years later took the road to Ctesiphon, this seemed mercenary and avaricious behaviour.[157] And it is not difficult to see his point of view. When the cycle of persecution, martyrdom and compromise unfolded in Alexandria, Damascius was very young; pained and disgusted by what he saw, he rebelled against submission and raised the banner of struggle: the genuineness of a man, he claimed, is tested in the market place; his public actions and public words are the mirror of his virtue; for 'when those learned men who sit in their corner and with a solemn air philosophise on justice and prudence are called to act, they disgrace themselves'.[158]

Behind these words lurks the influence of Isidore, an active and efficient man,[159] who knew exactly where to draw lines. When, for instance, he was asked to give up teaching for a time, Isidore refused to obey and sought another place to exercise his freedom of speech.[160] This behaviour, which Damascius compares with that of Socrates under the Thirty Tyrants, was in tune with that of their common master, Proclus, 'who swam with dignity and firmness through the stormy sea ploughed by hurricanes which raged against civilised life'.[161] Yet when 'men of prey' came and dragged him to the law-courts, Proclus felt that he had to leave Athens. His example was followed by Marinus, who during what seems to have been a fierce private quarrel over the Platonic Succession, decided to emigrate to Epidaurus rather than succumb to a martyr's fate.[162] After all the real concern of the Neoplatonist was victory over the inner enemy—the army of desires and irrational urges—since 'the real war of the Giants is fought within'.[163]

Being permanently aware of the fact that truth and reality are foreign to the world of becoming, and that in the best of cases society can be but a macrocosm of the soul, Damascius was even less capable than his predecessors of experiencing any patriotic emotions towards geographical locations. After all to him the entire world was divine, and holy sites were indiscriminately sown on the face of the earth. On arriving in Athens about the end of the century together with Isidore and finding Hegias passing for a great philosopher, Damascius felt an acute disappointment. The man was certainly well-born and pious, but so ignorant and *exalté* at the same time, that Isidore was forced to remark to him drily that 'those destined to be gods must first become human',[164] and to conclude sadly that the greatest gift sent by God to humanity, namely philosophy, was now not merely balancing on a razor's edge, but had reached

[156] See EP 184 together with EP 179.

[157] Fr. 316.

[158] Fr. 325; cf. EP 29.

[159] Fr. 25; EP 29.

[160] Fr. 336.

[161] Marinus, *VP* 15.

[162] Fr. 266.

[163] Proclus *In Parm.* i col. 692. 27-28: ὁ ὄντως γιγαντικὸς πόλεμος. ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐστί. *In Tim.* iii 346. 30-347.2: καὶ οὗτος ὄντως ἐστὶν ὁ γιγαντικὸς πόλεμος, τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν γηγενῆ τῶν Ὀλυμπίων ἐντιμότερα ποιῶν καὶ οὐχ ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς ὅλοις ὑποτάττων τὰ χείρονα τοῖς ἀμείνοσιν. Cf. *In Alc.* 44. 4; 104. 22. Victory in this battle results in a state of perfect freedom: EP 255.

[164] EP 227, a standard Neoplatonic witticism, cf. Hierocles *In aur. cat.* (Kohler) *Proem.* 4, p.6.

the point of extreme decrepitude. In his disappointment Isidore left Athens.[165] But Damascius stayed on and became the last official *diadochus* of the Academy, initiating a campaign for its revival.

This campaign, which had a physical, a human and an institutional aspect, was to some extent inspired by the example of Aphrodisias, visited by Damascius in his youth. The mansion at the side of the Sebasteion, which was converted, presumably by Asclepiodotus, into a 'cultural centre' of untold splendour,[166] may have kindled Damascius' envy,[167] but at the same time it must have set in motion more constructive emotions in him, which came to fruition when he became head of the only official institution propagating the Platonic doctrines.[168] Delving into the finances of the Academy[169] and using his connections, Damascius discovered ways which would enable him to turn his vision into reality. Naturally his primary concern was with the scholarly level of the Academy; accordingly he summoned from all over 'the domain of Hellenism' the most famous philosophers of the day.[170] The distinguished community that Damascius assembled and whose daily needs involved teaching, research and the performance of cultic acts, clearly required living quarters, and not just one building, but a vast complex with diverse facilities.

As the strongest candidate for Damascius' academic premises I propose the three late antique houses (A, B and C) on the North slope of the Areopagus, whose function (traumatically interrupted in the early sixth century) has invariably been described by the excavators as educational.[171] Though this is not the place to argue in detail my identification,[172] I would nevertheless like to point out certain striking analogies between the most splendid of the Areopagus houses and the Sebasteion House in Aphrodisias. Like it, Athenian House C is a large mansion (covering an area exceeding 1.500 sq. metres), with a private section and a more public one, each respectively arranged around a peristyle court. Its elaborate apsidal suite adjoining a nymphaeum of extraordinary grace recalls to the mind the court of the Sebasteion House where the shield portraits of philosophers and men of action stood. Built in the late fourth century AD, House C may have been the ancestral residence of Theagenes and Hegias or of some other Athenian magnate of pagan sympathies, as its remarkable collection of antique statuary among other things suggests. The bulk of this collection (which is dominated by a religious rather than a merely aesthetic criterion) was deposited in two of the wells of the house at a date which can be inferred from archaeological data to coincide with 529. As for the few articles which were either left lying around or less carefully hidden, they were deliberately mutilated and used for purposes clearly intended to cause offence. Among other significant alterations, the new owner had the floor of the triclinium in the apsidal suite reset in a cruciform pattern, obviously in replacement of some theological scene which wounded his religious sensibilities.

[165] EP 228-229.

[166] See Smith 1990 and 1991 (n. 16).

[167] Damascius goes to a lot of trouble to demolish Asclepiodotus' fame as an all-round intellectual and holy-man (cf. p. 3), a claim which is indeed splendidly reflected in the newly discovered 'Pantokrator' medallion (cf. Smith 1991 [n. 16] portrait No. 8 fig. 9), which shows a truly conceited man posing as a God.

[168] See above, pp. 4-5.

[169] As is clear from fr. 265.

[170] Agathias ii 30.3: τὸ ἄκρον ἄωτον (...) τῶν ἐν τῷ καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνῳ φιλοσοφησάντων.

[171] See *Hesperia* xlii (1973) 156-164 (T.L. Shear Jr.); A. Frantz (n. 1) 37-48; J.McK. Camp, 'The philosophical schools of Roman Athens', S. Walker-Averil Cameron (eds), *The Greek renaissance in the Roman empire* (*BICS* Suppl. lv (1989)) 50-55.

[172] A task to which a section in the Introduction to my forthcoming translation of the *Philosophical history* is devoted.

The story told by the Areopagus ruins is not different from that of the literary sources: the revived Academy of the early sixth century became the first target in Justinian's anti-pagan campaign. When this happened, Damascius, a pragmatic and decisive man, broke away from the precarious and stifling atmosphere of cities like Athens and Alexandria and led his companions to the Unknown.

VI. On the fringes of the empire

In the frontier zone between the Persian and the Byzantine empires lay the ancient city of Harran. In the face of advancing Christianity Harran held stubbornly to its traditional culture, and so extreme was its intellectual and religious loyalty to the past that by the mid-fifth century it became generally known as Ἑλλήνων πόλις.[173] Harran's significance as a potent symbol of paganism had been duly emphasised a century earlier by the Emperor Julian who, on his way to fight the Persians, delayed for several days there, visiting the city's sanctuaries.[174] Indeed it was in the temple of Harran's patron deity—the Babylonian moon god Sin—that in an occult ceremony Julian seems to have nominated as his successor his pagan cousin, Procopius, should he himself perish in the campaign.[175]

Unlike other important centres of paganism in the Roman empire—cities such as Aphrodisias or Athens—Harran was a frontier town both in cultural and in military terms. On the one hand its *Hochkultur* was not overwhelmingly Hellenic, but a genuine hybrid of Semitic and Greek elements, while on the other the town lay in a strategically sensitive zone, well away from the centres of power, so that any attempt on the part of the emperor to displease its citizens could prove just as difficult in practical terms as it was politically unwise. For these reasons late antique Harran was allowed to develop its diverse culture in an atypically liberal climate, a circumstance which accounts both for the idiosyncratic character of this culture and for its vitality in an age which notoriously tended towards conformity.

In his attempt to render the empire as monochrome as possible, Justinian set himself the task of extirpating paganism, and issued in 529 a decree prohibiting philosophical teaching in Athens.[176] What instigated this special treatment was, as already shown, the revival of the Athenian School under Damascius; men of exceptional intellectual abilities had gathered around him and had immersed themselves in study and teaching in circumstances which could be deemed ideal. It was then that Justinian's edict came. Damascius, who had seen several waves of persecution come and go, felt that this time he had to resort to drastic measures;[177] and, like the jinns in the marvellous stories that he was collecting, he conceived the idea of transferring intact to another land the edifice that he had been building over the years. Platonic reminiscences of the constitutionally just character of the Persian king, as fashioned by the ideal

[173] E.g. Theodoret, *HE* iii 26.1: Κάρραι γάρ πόλις ἐστὶν καὶ νῦν ἔχουσα τῆς ἀσεβείας τὰ λείψανα. Cf. *ibid.* iv 18.14, v 4.6; *HR* xvii 5 (Abraham III): πόλις δὲ αὕτη τῆς δυσσεβείας περικειμένη τὴν μέθην καὶ τῇ τῶν δαιμόνων ἑαυτὴν ἐκδεδωκυῖα βακχείᾳ. For Ἑλλήνων πόλις, 'Acts of the Council of Chalcedon', E. Schwartz, *Acta Consiliorum Oecumenicorum* ii 1 (1933-55), p. 384, 3-4.

[174] Julian is in a great hurry (Ammianus xxiii 2.6; Sozomen vi 1.1), yet he stops for a few days at Carrhae (Ammianus xxiii 3.21: moratus aliquot dies), where he makes a point of visiting all the great temples and of offering sacrifices *ritu locorum* (Ammianus *loc. cit.*). It is typical of Libanius' cultural provincialism that he only mentions 'a great and ancient temple of Zeus' (*or.* xviii 214).

[175] Ammianus xxiii 3.2.

[176] Malalas *Chron.* (Bonn) 451: θεσπίσας πρόσταξιν ἔπεμψεν ἐν Ἀθήναις, κελεύσας μηδένα διδάσκειν φιλοσοφίαν. Cf. n. 1.

[177] The edict seems to have hit the philosophers both professionally as academics and personally as pagans (cf. Agathias ii 30.4). That they never returned to Athens is convincingly argued by H. Blumenthal (n. 1); the point is further supported by archaeological evidence (p. 23).

educational processes, mingled in his mind with the language of contemporary Sassanian propaganda and, suddenly, Ctesiphon appeared as the ideal philosophical abode.[178] Indeed, when compared with contemporary Constantinople, sixth-century Ctesiphon *was* a paradise of intellectual tolerance, and Damascius' choice was not as naive as Agathias makes it sound.[179]

Soon after 529, under the leadership of Damascius, his peers set out from Athens for the banks of the Tigris.[180] The trip must have been a long one: the seven men were leaving behind for ever (as they then thought) the Roman *oikoumene* and considerations of spiritual tourism, which formed such a strong tradition in the circle, would no doubt have prompted them to pay prolonged respects to important holy places.[181] Foremost among them was Harran. Just like Julian, Damascius and his companions must have stopped at this frontier town to visit its temples and examine its libraries.[182] Then they pressed on to Persia, where it took them only a short time to understand that reality fell short of legend. This realisation was enormously facilitated by the idealised memory of Harran, a city which in the minds of these mostly bilingual, and even bicultural, men combined a familiar intellectual climate with the security implicit in the proximity of the Persian border.[183] Thus the philosophers struck a wonderful deal when, shortly after their arrival in the Iranian capital, they persuaded Khusrau Anushirwan to include a provision on their behalf in the peace treaty that he was about to sign with Justinian (AD 532). This clause, which was undoubtedly phrased by Damascius, since even as reported by Agathias it contains an eminently Damascian structure as well as Damascian vocabulary, has the unique merit of constituting the only profession of ideological toleration ever signed by Justinian.[184] It provided that the philosophers should live in the Christian empire for the rest of their days 'without fear', never forced to profess belief in anything clashing with their own ideas or to change their traditional opinions.[185] And indeed, as Agathias assures us, from then onwards their life was spent 'in the most delightful and pleasant way possible'.[186]

After the conclusion of the peace treaty between the Sassanians and the Byzantines the seven men mentioned by Agathias seem to have returned to Harran; as four among them had a Graeco-Aramaic ethnic background and the remaining three came from lands considerably to the east of the Aegean, the cultural atmosphere of Harran must have appeared to them extremely

[178] Plato, *Alc. i* 121e-122a.

[179] That there was nothing naive in the philosophers' choice of Persia as a new home is shown by I. Hadot, who argues the point with reference to Nisibis, 'université nestorienne autrefois installée à Édesse en Syrie. Elle jouissait déjà avant 532 sous les rois perses d'une liberté de pensée considérable qui contrastait favorablement avec l'intolérance byzantine, à cause de laquelle cette école théologique avait dû fuir en Perse', *art. cit.* (n. 1) 9.

[180] The story is told by Agathias ii 30-31.

[181] See above, pp 9-10.

[182] That late antique Harran must have had important libraries is convincingly argued by I. Hadot, *art. cit.* (n. 1), 20-21.

[183] M. Tardieu, 'Sabiens coraniques et "sabiens" de Harran', *Journal asiatique* cclxxiv (1986) n. 102 (pp. 22-3), 28.

[184] Cf. Agathias ii 31.4 (οὐδὲ ὁτιοῦν πέρα τῶν δοκούντων φρονεῖν) with EP 150 (μηδ' αὖ μείζον φρονεῖν τῆς κοινωφελοῦς προαιρέσεως). In his recently published book (n. 52) 128-132, M. Tardieu dismisses the Agathias story about the philosophers' journey to Persia and back, and postulates that only Damascius visited Ctesiphon with the specific mission to persuade the Persian king to negotiate with Justinian's ambassadors the inclusion in the peace treaty of a clause ruling that the philosophers should be allowed to lead in the Roman empire 'the life of their choice'. Such a hypothesis is unsupported by the evidence, and I would add that the story of the incestuous Persian whose exposed corpse was buried by the philosophers in their ignorance of the Persian custom, is a detail which cannot have been invented by Agathias.

[185] Agathias ii 31.4. On the meaning of "ἐφ' ἑαυτοις" I agree with P. Foulkes (*JHS* cxii (1992) 143) *contra* I. Hadot.

[186] Agathias ii 31.3; that this phrase is richer in meaning than it appears is pointed out by I. Hadot (n. 1) 8.

congenial. Protected by imperial legislation and inspired by a friendly environment, the enterprising Damascius must have then set up the Academy in this North Mesopotamian paradise.[187] In gratitude to the Persian king and recalling their theoretical arguments, Damascius' colleague, Priscianus, wrote and sent to Khusrau a philosophical work, of which we possess only a Latin translation, *Solutiones eorum de quibus dubitavit Chosroes Persarum rex.*[188]

To the arguments recently advanced by M. Tardieu and I. Hadot in favour of the thesis that on their return from Persia the Neoplatonist philosophers settled in Harran, I would like to add some further considerations. The clause that his Iranian counterpart obliged Justinian to include in the peace treaty of 532 must have been felt as a serious blow to his authority by an emperor who was oversensitive in matters of religious policy. To allay his frustration about not being able to touch Harran, which was no doubt mentioned in the treaty as the philosophers' abode, Justinian turned his attention towards another two important frontier *foci* of paganism which, like Harran, had been allowed to survive unmolested for strategic reasons. Putting aside any political considerations, Justinian decided to hit Philae in Upper Egypt and Augila in the Libyan desert. Making what seems to be an additional point, he ordered the Persian deserter Narses Kamsarakan to march on Philae at the head of an important military force and deconsecrate the temple of Isis by expelling its clergy, by destroying the images of the gods and by turning the edifice into a church.[189] In the oasis of Augila on the other hand, where religious life still thrived, Justinian reformed the locals' 'polluted ancestral customs' by intense missionary work.[190]

Meanwhile in Harran Damascius and his colleagues expounded Iamblichan Neoplatonism within the framework of an institution.[191] Fertilised by the indigenous intellectual and cultic tradition, their teaching struck deep roots in that religiously unequivocal city. A first step towards acculturation was taken by Simplicius when, in an Aristotelian commentary, he opened a parenthesis on the various calendars in use at Harran.[192] Just as they had done in Athens, the philosophers continued to comment on Plato and eventually, in the culturally promiscuous atmosphere of this border town, they felt the need to add a further activity to the tasks of the Academy: they began to translate Greek texts into Syriac and at some point into Arabic too.[193] That the School of Harran was instrumental in the transmission of Greek theology to the Arab

[187] As argued by M. Tardieu (n. 183) and endorsed by I. Hadot (n. 1) 9, 17.

[188] I. Hadot (n. 1) 23 advances the legitimate assumption that the work must have been written at Harran.

[189] Procopius, *Bell.* i 19. 36-37. For the political importance of the cult of Isis at Philae, see Priscus fr. 21, *FHG* iv 100 (= Blockley fr. 27); cf. the pertinent remarks of F.R. Trombley, 'Paganism in the Greek world at the end of antiquity: the case of rural Anatolia and Greece', *HTR* lxxviii (1985) 342 n. 93. On the conversion of the temple into a church of St. Stephen, see E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae* ii (Paris 1969) Nos. 200-201 with their commentaries; for missionary activity in the area in the 540s and 550s, W.Y. Adams, *Nubia: corridor to Africa*[2] (Princeton 1984) 441-2. In 552, however, a pagan from Kom-Ombo in collaboration with the Blemmyes οὐκ ὤκνησεν (...) καὶ δαίμοσιν καὶ ξοάνοις ἀφιερῶσαι σηκούς: *Pap. Maspero* 67004 l. 7.

[190] Procopius, *Aed.* vi 2. 14-20.

[191] See the arguments presented by I. Hadot in support of Simplicius' teaching career at Harran (all references to the article cited in n. 1), 20. Whether a Neoplatonic School as such already existed in Harran and received the philosophers on their return from Persia is what I doubt; for the rest I espouse Hadot's hypothesis that the philsophers lived and taught together at Harran forming 'a school of thought', 21, 24. For Simplicius composing at Harran both his Commentary on the Manual of Epictetus, 18, 20, 28, and his Aristotelian Commentaries, 27-28, *id.* (n. 15) 51-65, 67, 168-187, 200-201. For Priscianus' Iamblichanism, see C.G. Steel, *The changing self: a study on the soul in later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus* (Brussels 1978) 9.

[192] M. Tardieu, 'Les calendriers en usage à Harran d'après les sources arabes et le commentaire de Simplicius à la Physique d'Aristote'; cf. I. Hadot, *Simplicius* (n. 1) 40-57.

[193] Tardieu (n. 183) 28, 39.

world seems now a well established fact. A measure of its desire to make an impact on the Roman *oikoumene* as soon as the School was set up and at the same time to strike an international profile is provided by the sharp dialogue in which its members engaged with John Philoponus.[194] Locally of course the influence of the School must have been tremendous; by violence and persuasion, Church and State attempted to arrest the re-invigorated paganism of the city, the Emperor Maurice ordering

> Stephanus, Bishop of Harran, to institute a persecution against the pagans of Harran. Some he managed to convert to Christianity while many who resisted he carved up, suspending their limbs in the main street of the town.[195]

This happened in the late sixth century. At the same time or a little later, a work of propaganda was specifically addressed to the pagans of Harran, inviting them to convert to Christianity.[196] But neither persecution nor persuasion could as yet affect the course of Harranian paganism.

The School's persistent aura after its refounding may have played some rôle in the decision of Marwan II to transfer the see of the Caliph to Harran. Harun al-Rasheed occupied himself with the material welfare of this ancient city, but his son, Al-Ma'mun, ominously questioned its challenge to religious conformity when he passed through it in 830.[197] His impact though was hardly felt. Traditional religion, known as 'Chaldaean paganism',[198] continued to flourish in Harran under the changed name of Sabism,[199] while the Academy found a powerful patron in the person of al-Ma'mun's general, Tahir b. Husein, 'who spent his time in the reading, interpretation and familiarity of the philosophers'.[200]

From 830 onwards, however, persecution became a less sporadic phenomenon for the pagans of Harran. Conversion—whether genuine or simulated—to one of the licit religions of the Medieval Middle East seemed once again the only way out of the social impasse created by the spirit of intolerance that reigned in Constantinople and Baghdad. A less radical (and more shrewd) choice was adherence to Hermetic theosophy; as Louis Massignon has very well observed, by emphasising the 'propheticism' of Hermes-Idris, the pagans of Harran had an aspect of their creed insinuated into the canon of officially tolerated religions.[201]

Whatever the impact of persecution on the population of Harran, however, the Academy continued to flourish.[202] Indeed it was towards the end of the ninth century that it produced its next most brilliant mind after Damascius. Tabit b. Kurra, a notable physician and philosopher, who became the court astronomer after his removal to Baghdad in 901, is the man

[194] For Philoponus' attacks on Proclus and Simplicius, see Blumenthal (n. 1) 372 n. 21, to which add the evidence from Cod. Coisl. 387 f. 153-4 (Athos, Magna Laura): Ἰωάννης ο Φιλόπονος, ὅστις καὶ κατὰ Πρισκιανοῦ ἠγωνίσατο, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ κατὰ Ἀριστοτέλους.

[195] Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* (trans. Chabot) ii 375.

[196] For an edition, translation and commentary on the text, see S. Brock, 'A Syriac collection of prophecies of the pagan philosophers', *OLP* xiv (1983) 203-246.

[197] Cf. the testimony of Abu Yusuf Isha 'al Qatiy'i *ap.* al-Nadim, *Fihrist* (trans. Dodge) ii 751-753.

[198] Harnaniyah al-Kaldaniyin: (n. 197) 745 n. 2.

[199] On the Sabeans, see the more recent work by J. Hjärpe, *Analyse critique des traditions arabes sur les Sabéens harraniens* (Uppsala 1972).

[200] Michael the Syrian, *Chronicon* (trans. Chabot) iii 36.

[201] L. Massignon, 'Inventaire de la littérature arabe', A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* i (Paris 1944) 385.

[202] One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of imperial policies in frontier areas like Harran was their very remoteness from the centres of power, which meant that local governors could afford to ignore the orders of the ruler. A case in point is provided by the behaviour of the Emir of Harran, Ibrahim, under the caliph al-Ma'mun, who encouraged the pagans in the exercise of their religious practices rather than persecuting them: Michael the Syrian (n. 200) 34.

responsible for the flowering of Neoplatonic science and philosophy in the Abbasid capital. A man proficient in Greek, Syriac and Arabic and a universal genius,[203] Tabit b. Kurra seems to have led a group of promising pupils to Baghdad after deciding that the intellectual climate in Harran was becoming too stifling.[204] What is of particular interest to us, though, is the fact that, not unlike Damascius, Tabit b. Kurra wrote a religious history of late Hellenism.[205] And, just as Photius preserved samples of Damascius' *Philosophical History* for stylistic reasons, so too did Bar Hebraeus in connection with the Harranian philosopher's text. In a fragment strongly reminiscent of Damascius' tone, Kurra describes the effects of persecution in Harran, but also allows us a glimpse into his own attitude towards martyrdom.

> Although many have been subjugated to error by means of torture, our fathers by the hand of God have endured and spoken valiantly, and this blessed city hath never been defiled with the error of Nazareth. And we are the heirs, and transmitters to our heirs of paganism, which is honoured gloriously in this world. Lucky is he who beareth the burden with a sure hope for the sake of paganism.[206]

Subsequently Tabit b. Kurra goes on to say that all the culture and civilisation of which this world can boast is the gift of the pagans to humanity.

About half a century after these sentiments were expressed, Harran was visited by the Herodotus of the Arab world, al-Mas'udi, who wrote the following:

> In the time of the Hellenes and during the early days of the empire of the Rum [the Byzantines] (...) the sciences were honoured and enjoyed universal respect. From an already solid and grandiose foundation, they were raised to greater heights every day, until the Christian religion made its appearance among the Rum; this was a fatal blow to the edifice of learning; its traces disappeared and its pathways were effaced.[207]

Al-Mas'udi came to Harran shortly before 947. He was shown round the Academy by Malik b. Ukbun, who must have been its head at the time, and by his colleagues, who translated for him the Syriac inscription on the door knocker of the building: 'he who knows his nature becomes god'.[208] This maxim, which sums up the teaching of the Neoplatonists (and of the Sufis of Islam), is aptly linked by Mas'udi with the fact that the Greek philosophers do not accept the authority of a revealed book and of a sent prophet, but believe instead in the essential divinity of Man.[209]

Before visiting Harran, Mas'udi had done his homework. Once there, he discussed some of the theoretical and practical questions which had occurred to him during his readings and went away with the strong impression that most philosophers were anti-ritualists, who disapproved of the colourful religious practices performed by their less sophisticated fellow-citizens.[210]

The antithesis between a spiritual *Hochreligion* and popular ceremonialism, as attested by

[203] Cf. Gregory Abū'l Faraj Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography* (trans. Budge) i 152-153.

[204] On the reasons dictating Tabit b. Kurra's emigration from Harran, see Tardieu (n. 183) 19-20, who modifies Schwolson's and Hjärpe's views on the subject in a sensible way.

[205] A few fragments of this *History* are preserved by Bar Hebraeus in his *Chronography*.

[206] Bar Hebraeus (n. 203) 153; I thank Dr S. Brock for checking the translation of this passage for me. Significantly the word for 'paganism' in the passage is *hanputa*, a descriptive rather than pejorative term for non-Christian/Jewish religion.

[207] Mas'udi, *Les prairies d'or* (ed., trans. B. de Meynard—P. de Courtelle, C. Pellat) ii 741, 278 (with adjustments to the translation).

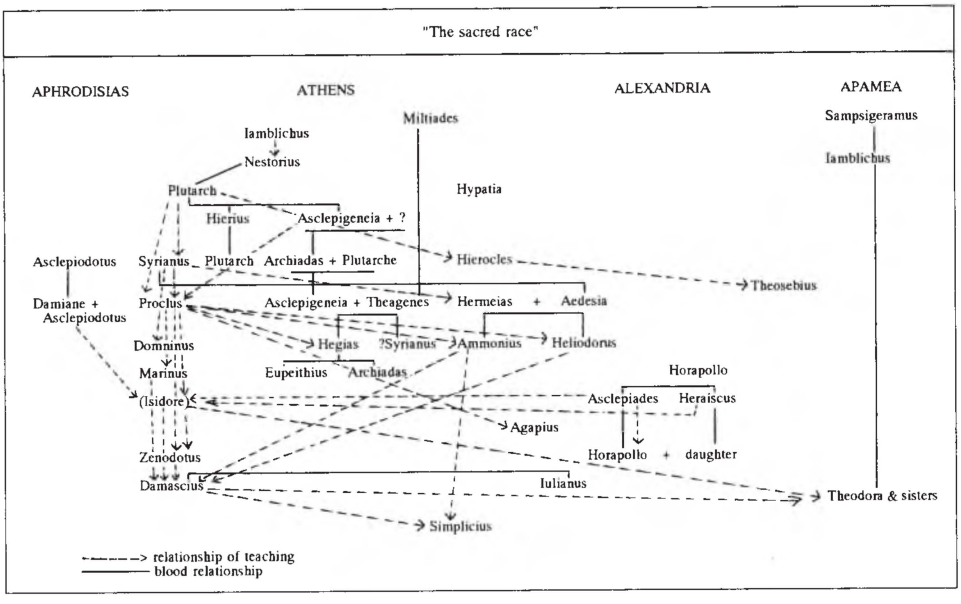
[208] Mas'udi (n. 207) 1395, 536. Tardieu (n. 183) 14, was the first to identify this quotation with Plato *Alc. i* 133c, and trace its Neoplatonic descendance, 16. On the existence of a formal Academy at Harran in the tenth century, Tardieu (n. 183) 16-17, whose argument appears to me conclusive.

[209] Mas'udi (n. 207) 1396, 537.

[210] Mas'udi (n. 207) 1397, 537-8.

al-Mas'udi, is not the only respect in which Harranian paganism had become polarised. The issue of orthodoxy, which had divided Neoplatonists in Athens, had become so pronounced with the passing of centuries that Mas'udi left the Academy with the belief that, whereas Iamblichus was the very repository of ancient wisdom, his correspondent, Porphyry, was a Christian sympathiser of Platonic views.[211] An earlier and richer report on Harranian paganism had made exactly the same points as al-Mas'udi. According to 'the philosopher of the Arabs', Al-Kindi (801-860), the Chaldaean pagans (Harnaniyah al-Kaldaniyin) were a learned sect with typically Neoplatonic ethics and metaphysics and a sophisticated astrological ritual at variance with the idolatrous practices of the multitude. Moreover, Aristotle was understood by them in strictly Platonic terms, and so was the theology of Egypt, whether ancient or Hermetic.[212]

Al-Mas'udi is the last author to mention the School at Harran, which in view of the political fortunes of the area cannot have survived after the eleventh century. Its message, however, had already found its way into heterodox Islam. Indeed it was thanks to the stepping stone of Harran and to Damascius' inspired decisiveness that Neoplatonic theology reached Baghdad by a clearly definable—if not direct—line from Athens.[213]



[211] The evidence, from Mas'udi, *Kitab al-tambih wa-l-israf*, is presented and commented upon by Tardieu (n. 183) 14-16.

[212] Al-Nadim, *Fihrist* ii (n. 197) 745-750. For a recent consideration of the authors discussed here, see T. M. Green, *The city of the moon god: religious traditions of Harran* (Leiden 1992) *passim*.

[213] In the history of this transmission there were vaguer paths, such as those which seem to have led from Athens and Alexandria to Panopolis, and from Panopolis/Ikhmim to Damascus and Baghdad through figures of such crucial importance as the great mystic of the ninth century Dhû'l Nun; cf. Ibn 'Arabî, *La vie merveilleuse de Dhû-l-Nun l'Égyptien* (trans. R. Deladrière) (Paris 1988) 15-16.

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XIX

Who was Count Zosimus?

The old-fashioned accountant, whom an overwhelming sense of living in "an era of sterility" drove to write a contemporary history, has probably left in his narrative enough autobiographical clues to make it worth attempting a reconstruction of the jigsaw puzzle of his formative years. Zosimus' *New History* is a Polybian endeavour deliberately reversed.[1] On its opening page, the author announces his intention to write the history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and reflects on the causes of its apogee and its decadence. He concludes in a spirit of temperate determinism that moral laziness and spiritual unconcern[2] are responsible for the desperate state of things in his day.[3] At the same time however he acknowledges the role played by Providence in human affairs and seems to regard impiety as a result of an abeyance of the divine,[4] though it is not clear in his circular way of thinking which is cause and which is effect.

If Polybius provides a model for Zosimus' history, Eunapius and Olympiodorus are its basic sources.[5] More revealingly, the

N.B. In this article, numbers in bold in the footnotes refer to fragments in *Damascius, The Philosophical History: Text with Translation and Notes*, ed. P. Athanassiadi, Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999.

[1] For an explicit statement see I.57.1: Πολυβίου γὰρ ὅπως ἐκτήσαντο Ῥωμαῖοι τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ διεξελθόντος, ὅπως ἐν οὐ πολλῷ χρόνῳ σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν αὐτὴν διέφθειραν ἔρχομαι λέξων.

[2] Ἐκμέλεια is one of Zosimus' favourite terms to describe the failure of imperial policies both in military and administrative terms.

[3] The theme of decadence reaches obsessive dimensions in the *New History*: for a few examples, I.1.2, 58.4; II.5.5, 7.1, 34.2; IV.59; V.40.4.

[4] Cf. V.35.5: ἐν ἐρημίᾳ τοῦ θείου. See also V.51,2.

[5] According to Photius (*Bibl. cod.* 98) "one could say that [Zosimus] has not written a history but has transcribed the one by Eunapius". Eunapius is the

figure who dominates it is Julian.[6] For the emperor is present in the *New History* in subtler and more significant ways than the mere dedication of Book III to his works and days. The assessment of the Roman emperors in Book I closely follows Julian's *Caesars*, with one significant exception –Aurelian, whom Zosimus, clearly relying on Eunapius, sees as a landmark in the history of paganism.[7] Otherwise Julian constitutes both a linguistic and a conceptual model for the *New History*, with whole phrases and images faithfully reproduced.[8]

An unimaginative user both of his sources and of the Greek language, Zosimus pursues his flat narrative in a simple, dry style.[9] Apart from a vivid interest in administrative and more specifically taxation issues, clearly inspired by the author's professional background, his prosaic account is illuminated by flashes of uncommon passion on the subject of Christianity and, on the linguistic and literary level, by the use of technical Neoplatonic vocabulary and of "inside" texts and stories. Yet it is the very unoriginality of Zosimus' writing that should serve as our best guide in any attempt to detect his milieu and find out about the genesis of his History.

About Zosimus we know remarkably little. Internal evidence

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fundamental source as far as V.25 (A.D. 404), whereas the part of the *New History* describing the events from 404 to 410 seems to be based on Olympiodorus whose History Zosimus clearly intended to continue. Dexippus' *Scythica* and Nichomachus Flavianus' *Annales* also seem to have been used by Zosimus independently. For a discussion of the matter, Paschoud, *Zosime* I, pp. XXI-LXIII and III.2, pp. 82-91.

[6] Julian is given by Zosimus the surname "Great" (Ἰουλιανὸς ὁ μέγας: V.2.1).

[7] Zos. I.48-62; cf. Julian, *or.* X. 313d, who is critical towards Aurelian.

[8] In III.2.4 Zosimus declares himself to be a thorough reader of Julian's works, and encourages his reader to be the same. For expressions copied from Julian: 312a and I.7.1; 312d and I.8.2; 313a and I.10.1; 313b and I.12.2; 32a, 274c and I.21.2; more importantly in II.29 the reasons given for Constantine's conversion to Christianity reproduce 336ab; while 329ab (on Constantine as a devotee and protégé of Tryphe and an impositor of new taxes) is at the basis of Zosimus' statement. The description of the Antiochene character in IV.41.1 seems to come straight from the *Misopogon*, of which Zosimus elsewhere gives a sensitive definition (III.11.5).

[9] Photius (*loc. cit.*) pertinently comments on the divergence between the elaborate manner of Eunapius and Zosimus' unadorned style.

places the composition of the *New History* after 498, with a date nearer the end of Anastasius' reign in 518, which constitutes its terminus ante quem.[10] According to the manuscript tradition its author was a retired *advocatus fisci,* for whom we can claim Palestinian origins on onomastic grounds. A notice in the Suda speaks of a certain Zosimus from Gaza or Ascalon who lived under Anastasius and wrote commentaries on Demosthenes and Lysias as well as a theoretical treatise on rhetoric.[11] Disregarding minor points, we can take the core of this information as referring to our historian, whose rhetorical education is beyond doubt, whether or not he is the author of the particular treatises mentioned in the Suda; as for the supposition of a Palestinian origin, this is strengthened by the specific antipathy professed by Zosimus towards the Arabs, at the basis of which one may detect the prejudice of a coastal inhabitant for the people of the hinterland. By contrast to "the disgusting Arabs", Zosimus praises the Egyptians as loyal, polite, brave and just.[12] If his pro-Egyptian bias suggests a happy relationship with that country, the thought springs to the mind that Zosimus belonged to a generation of Palestinians, specifically from Gaza, who studied in Alexandria, and cultivated all aspects of literature in works which commemorate their Alexandrian experiences. Aeneas and Procopius of Gaza, in both of whose correspondence there appears a Zosimus,[13] are just two of the Christian thinkers who immortalised the debates of their youth in the form of philosophical dialogues or commentaries. More relevantly, Zacharias of Gaza, who studied rhetoric in Horapollo's school in the 480s before going on to read law in

[10] For a discussion, Paschoud, *Zosime* III 2, pp. 80-81.

[11] S II 515, 9 (Ζώσιμος 169).

[12] I.18.3 (on the Arabs); IV.30, 31 (on the Egyptians).

[13] The addressee of ep. 153, being a pupil of Procopius about to embark on his legal studies, cannot be our Zosimus on chronological grounds; moreover the tone of the letter suggests that he is a Christian. Equally unlikely to be our Zosimus is the addressee of ep. 8 by Aeneas, while the addressee of ep. 10 could plausibly be ideutified with our historian. Positano (89-90) identifies him with the Suda sophist (cf. above, n. 11).

Beirut, produced, in addition to his anti-Neoplatonic dialogue *Ammonius* and the *Life of Severus*, a Church History which covers Zeno's reign. The works of these men help us reconstruct a lively intellectual milieu with its animated discussions between pagans and Christians. Aegyptus, Gessius and Ammonius are only some of the identifiable interlocutors, while the subjects on which these men exerted their mind and erudition include the eternity of the world and the immortality of the soul, the role of Providence in human affairs, the veracity of the pagan prophetic tradition, revelation in its various forms and, most importantly, the definition of monotheism.

Traces of all these debates are to be found in the work of an Anonymous entitled *Theosophia*[14] which was composed, presumably in Alexandria, between 474 and 491. According to the information provided by the Prologue, the work comprised eleven books of which the first seven, now lost, expounded "the right doctrine" (Περὶ τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως); books 8 to 10, of which we have substantial fragments, showed that "the oracles of the Greek gods and the so-called theologies of the Greek and Egyptian sages as well as the Sibylline oracles agree with the objective (σκοπός) of the divine scriptures" (§ 1); finally Book 11 consisted of a brief chronicle from Adam to the reign of Zeno (§ 2). Specific features of the work are familiarity with Egypt expressed in both religious and patriographic terms,[15] an emphasis on negative theology accompanied by technical Neoplatonic vocabulary in the commentary on the oracles quoted,[16] the centrality of Sibylline material, which covers almost half of what survives, and finally a first hand knowledge of Porphyry and Syrianus (§§ 27, 20, 50, 65).

[14] According to the author (§ 5), the title was chosen to indicate τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς Ἕλληνας σοφισθῆναι.

[15] See e.g. §§ 8 (on Osiris with comments on the etymology and meaning of the name which recall Damascius **3**); 31, 44 (on Hermes Trismegistus); 25 (on Sarapis); 45-49 (specific temples in Upper Egypt); 69 (specific address of Heraclitus to the Egyptians).

[16] For a few typical terms with Chaldaean undertones: ὀχετεύουσα (§ 6); ἐννοίας ἀνακινῶν (§ 7); νοητὸν πῦρ (§ 14); ἐπίπνοια (S 3. 92);

A recurrent interest in linguistics and etymology points to a possible link between Horapollo's class-room and this work, the main connection of course being its often recondite Egyptianism.

An injunction to the pagans to convert to Christianity, the *Theosophia* is clearly the product of a contemporary debate in the same way as are the *Theophrastus* and the *Ammonius*. At the same time however it presents striking affinities with Zosimus' *New History*, which stops suddenly in 410, but was presumably intended to cover the reign of Zeno, the emperor preceding the one in whose reign the author wrote, as was the custom. To the Sibylline oracles foretelling the birth of Christ according to the Anonymous, Zosimus opposes his own version of the Sibylline truth in an otherwise inexplicable digression on the Secular Games which differentiates him from his source, in order to show how, due to Constantine's impiety, the empire was doomed to disaster.[17] The digression on the history and etymology of the term *pontifex* in IV.36 is equally a piece of anti-Christian polemic defending the high antiquity of Roman sacred institutions. More ancient even than the invention of temples (for which Zosimus here uses the peculiarly Damascian term ἕδος)[18] the *Pontifices* (γεφυραῖοι) have their origin in Greece, and more specifically in the land of prophecy and magic, Thessaly. While Mendelssohn saw that this digression was added by Zosimus himself,[19] Paschoud claims for it a Eunapian origin and goes on to attribute the invention of the story to a syncretistic milieu of Philhellenic Romans.[20] On account of the fantastic etymology produced by Zosimus for the Latin *pontifex*, which is very much in the style of Horapollo's pronouncements on the hieroglyphics, the occurrence of turns of phrase which also appear in Damascius,[21] and above all the

[17] II.1-7.

[18] Cf. **75A** with relevant note.

[19] Videtur Zosimus sapientiam istam de pontificibus non ex Eunapio sed ex alio quopiam fonte derivasse: p. 192.

[20] Nichomachus Flavianus and his *Annales* are mentioned in this connection as the obvious source of Zosimus: II.2, pp. 417-418.

[21] Cf. Ἕδη and **75A;** ἀπεσείσατο τὴν αἴτησιν and **113R**.

Hellenocentric Roman patriotism of the whole passage, I would identify it as a piece of late Neoplatonic propaganda. A third indication pointing towards Horapollo's circle is the story of the salvation of Attica from the earthquake of 375 through the activities of Nestorius as related by Zosimus in IV.18. This also comes from an independent source, Syrianus, and sounds like a characteristic piece of Neoplatonic mythology. Emphasising the double link of the golden chain of the Athenian Platonists with the Eleusinian mysteries on the one hand and Chaldaean wisdom on the other, Zosimus' narration preserves an air of orality. But its purpose is to mark a moment in human history when divine providence intervened as a result of the pious maintainance of tradition.

A historical "orthodoxy" with significant landmarks, sacred geographical loci such as Alexandria, and black anniversaries such as the destruction of the Serapeion in 391, had been fully established by Zosimus' day. According to Zosimus, who here echoes Eunapius, Theophilus, the man responsible for this destruction, was "ὁ πρῶτος ἀρξάμενος τῆς κατὰ τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ τῶν ἐξ αἰῶνος πατρίων ἐπιβουλῆς",[22] a claim which is valid only if one views things from the Egyptian perspective,[23] but which is corroborated by Damascius within the framework of the Neoplatonic rather than merely Egyptocentric way of writing history; revealingly the *Philosophical History* also treats the destruction of the Serapeion as the opening episode in the narration of the sufferings of the pagan intelligentsia.[24] It is reasonable to assume that Zosimus' familiarity with Neoplatonic "inside" stories and the cogent presentation of the important landmarks in declining paganism by a historian who on the whole lacks originality suggest that he was formed in a militantly pagan milieu which encouraged him to continue Olympiodorus' history, and it is

[22] V.23.3. Cf. IV.37.3: on Cynegius' anti-pagan activities "in the whole of Egypt and Alexandria itself".

[23] As is rightly pointed out by Paschoud, III.1, 178.

[24] **42**.

in this connection that one particularly regrets the fact that the work suddenly stops in 410.

The scholarly consensus is that *New History* means "history of the contemporary era". The ambiguity of the title however may not be entirely unintentional in what was presumably seen by the author of the work and those sponsoring him as a pagan answer to the truly *new* type of history – the ecclesiastical. If indeed Zosimus emerged from the same milieu as the *Theosophia* Anonymous and Zacharias, the *New History* would be not only a response to the Eusebian historical model, but also an answer to provocations nearer to home.

A fourth native of the city of Gaza who studied under Horapollo and shared his interests was Timotheus. Known both from a notice in the Suda and from his surviving work, Timotheus of Gaza wrote on the theory of grammar (Κανόνες καθολικοὶ περὶ συντάξεως), but also on zoology along the paradoxographical lines represented by Horapollo in the *Hieroglyphica* and Damascius in the *Philosophical History*. Most interestingly of all, we owe to him a "tragedy" addressed to the emperor Anastasius on the abolition of the *collatio lustralis* or *chrysargyron*.[25] This is a subject that Zosimus also treats in a "tragic" manner. In II.38 he speaks of the desperate state to which individuals and cities had been reduced in a few generations as a result of having to pay the odious *collatio lustralis* introduced by Constantine, and declares the tax to be the main culprit for the depopulation of the cities of the Empire.[26] Procopius of Gaza (whom Paschoud assumes to have been Zosimus' teacher but who must have been his peer since he belonged to the same generation) also wrote a panegyric to Anastasius in which he offers information on the same tax, so that it may be more than a coincidence that the subject was of interest to men who came from Gaza and studied in Alexandria.

[25] τραγῳδία περὶ τοῦ δημοσίου τοῦ καλουμένου χρυσαργύρου. PLRE II, s.v. 'Timotheus 3' translates the word τραγῳδία as "oration"; in the light of Zosimus' treatment of the subject I do not find this interpretation necessary.

[26] The destruction of cities is a leitmotiv of the *New History*: cf. I.31, 37.3; II.34.2, 38.4; III.5.1; IV.29.2, 32.2, 59.3 ; V.14.4.

Leaving aside the prosopographical data, we may turn in our search for Zosimus to a field unexplored so far: his use of language.[27] A survey of the latter reveals a wide usage of specifically Neoplatonic vocabulary[28] which, when combined with the themes of anti-Christian polemic pursued by Zosimus, the patriographic treatment of Constantinople (II.30-31; III.11.3) and certain formulaic expressions which also occur in Damascius' *Philosophical History*, reinforces the hypothesis of a common milieu for the two men.[29] Indeed it looks more and more as if Zosimus' aggressive paganism was formed in the 480s partly by systematic preaching and propaganda, such as that practised in *Psychapollo*'s school,[30] and partly by a traumatic experience, such as the witnessing of the pagan persecution in Alexandria at the close of the decade.

[27] In his attempt to explain the fact that no important studies have been devoted to the language of Zosimus so far, Paschoud concedes "que la langue banale de Zosime n'attire guère l'attention des spécialistes" (I, p. LXXIV), and goes on to describe it as a *koine* influenced both by the author's classical readings and by common usage –a proposition with which I fully agree– and to comment on the vague and monotonous character of the author's style. Yet like his predecessors Paschoud seems to be more interested in the grammatical and syntactic rather than the lexical aspect of Zosimus' *History*.

[28] κατὰ πῆχυν...ἐπιδιδόντος (IV.4.41.1); πρηστῆρες (V.41.1); περίνοιαι (I.3.1); σειρά (V.35.5); ἱερὰ ἁγιστεία (II.29.5; κατὰ τὸ πάτριον ἁγιστεία: V.41.3); ἱερουργία (II.3.1;4.2); ὃ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα λαχὼν ἀλιτήριος δαίμων (V.41.5).

[29] A by no means exhaustive list of words, expressions and standard quotations to be found in the two texts is the following: τὰ τῶν θεῶν ἕδη (IV.33.4; IV.36.2 and **75A**); κατὰ πῆχυν τὸ λεγόμενον ἐφ'ἑκάστης ἐπιδιδόντος (IV.41.1 and **110AB**); ὡραΐζομένου (IV.42.5; 51.1 and **66A**); ἤνυε δὲ οὐδέν (IV.53.2; V.44.1 and **151B**); ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ ἀπράγμονες (I.5.4; I.13.3 and **108**); ἡ κρατοῦσα δόξα (V.41.2 and **118B**); τῶν δὲ πραγμάτων ἐπὶ λεπτοτάτης ἑστώτων ἐλπίδος (IV.24.3 and **150**); τὰ συνέχοντα τὸ ἀνθρώπειον γένος ἁγιώτατα μυστήρια (IV.3.3 and **42F**); ἐπαρθέντες ταῖς ἐλπίσιν (IV.26.8 and **113C**); τὸ δὲ ὅπως εἰδώς, ὑπερβήσομαι (III.12.1 and **39B**); μὴ ἀποσείσασθαι τὰ δωρούμενα παρὰ τῆς τύχης (IV.54.2; IV.55.3; IV.36.5 and **113R**). The prophetic prodigy in IV.21.1 is eminently reminiscent of Damascius both in subject matter and narrative style, while the description of Fravitta in V.20 combines the phrases used by Damascius for the description of Olympos and Marcellinus.

[30] Cf. above, pp. 20-21.

XX

Christians and Others: The Conversion Ethos of Late Antiquity

Polymnia Athanassiadi

Setting Boundaries

The subject proposed by the organizers of the Seminar was conversion to Christianity and Islam in Late Antiquity, with Manichaeism and Buddhism also brought into the picture as *comparanda*, under the rubric 'beyond'. Bringing this 'beyond' closer to home, I would go slightly further and suggest that, before Islam enters onto the scene, Judaism, Samaritanism and diverse forms of Hellenism were also important actors in the late antique drama of conversion. If included in the discussion, they help illustrate the complexity and fluidity of the notion as an untidy psychological process and a ubiquitous social trend.[1] Transversal to both Christianity and Islam, the religious traditions in question ceaselessly inform, form and reform both thought-worlds, while at the same time challenging them. But to go back to my original metaphor: against an ever changing backcloth, the players on the stage do not remain static; they develop in themselves according to an inner dynamic, while continuously interacting with each other.

Conversion is about personal identity as well as about the salvation of the soul. It entails a voluntary or coerced crossing of boundaries, resulting in a change (real or imagined, genuine or feigned) of the self. As the transmuting of a given (or chosen) identity into a different one and the integration of the individual into a new spiritual (and indeed social) milieu, conversion has a political as well

[1] These issues have been addressed with reference to the rise of Christianity in the Greek East in a fine volume edited by Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton, *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, NY, 2003). In a well thought-out article entitled 'De quelques homologies entre ralliements confessionnels en régime chrétien et adhésions au christianisme dans l'Antiquité tardive', in Corinne Bonnet, Sergio Ribichini and Dirk Steuernagel (eds), *Religioni in contatto nel Mediterraneo Antico: Modalità di diffusione e processi di interferenza* (*Mediterranea* 4) (Pisa, Rome, 2008), pp. 263–80, Michel-Yves Perrin has proposed various categories of Christian 'adhesion' during the period from c. 200 to the 430s, while offering helpful suggestions for the organization of future research in the area. In this paper I attempt at once a more general and a more detailed discussion of issues connected with the thematic of conversion.

as a moral dimension, which may involve the freedom of the will. This aspect of our subject will be briefly discussed with reference to the great watershed of the mid-third century which is associated with the name of the Emperor Decius. One last preliminary remark concerns the chronological framework within which the drama of conversion is acted out. The area of Late Antiquity, as we all know, is a relatively new historiographical construct whose temporal and geographical boundaries vary considerably according to the object of research and the perspective of the viewer. As regards intellectual history, in whose jurisdiction the phenomenon of conversion broadly falls, I would postulate a long Hellenistic era in the Greater Eastern Mediterranean.[2] I would also claim that as a mode of thinking, feeling and behaving, the conversion ethos represents one of the main features of the millennium of Hellenistic and later antiquity, and indeed contributes to its basic identity. Developments, shifts and breaks in the wider social and political setting of this extended period naturally affect the ways in which conversion is perceived and brought about, and the examples chosen in this paper attempt to illustrate this variety in both its horizontal and vertical dimensions. But let us go back to the beginning. In an attempt to explain and justify the spread of the conversion ethos in the post-classical world Per Bilde writes:

> The Hellenistic-Roman world was to a high degree a world of individualism and *individuality*. This feature is closely related to cosmopolitanism, conversion and mobility, and these characteristics are all products of the establishment of a world-wide dynamic urban civilization. This civilization posed a threat to all kinds of ethnic, local and traditional cultural structures. The Hellenistic-Roman urban civilization created a crisis for the individual, because it eroded the traditional basis of his identity and symbolic universe. In the cities, therefore, traditional attitudes, values, ideas, cultures and religions broke down or were re-interpreted and transformed. The urban individual was not born into his culture, religion, values and identity. Furthermore, he had often moved away from his traditional local home to some larger city where he lived together with people from numerous other cultures. There he was left in relative individual isolation, becoming a cosmopolitan person open to conversion.[3]

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[2] See in this connection Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999), 'Introduction', p. 3, and more specifically, Polymnia Athanassiadi, 'Antiquité tardive: construction et déconstruction d'un modèle historiographique', *Antiquité Tardive*, 14 (2006), pp. 311–24, and 'From Man to God, or the Mutation of a Culture (300BC–762AD)', in Anastasia Drandaki et al. (eds), *Heaven & Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, 2 vols (Athens, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 28–43.

[3] 'Jesus and Paul: A Methodological Essay on two Cases of Religious Innovation in the Context of Centre Periphery Relations', in Per Bilde et al. (eds), *Centre and Periphery in the Hellenistic world* (Aarhus, 1993), pp. 316–38 at pp. 331–2.

Bilde tells us with exceptional clarity why the man in the street felt the need to convert in the Hellenistic-Roman world. Yet the urge towards conversion, which was intensified by the social conditions of the new era, has its roots in late classical times, as one of the major themes of the Socratic teaching. For a famous example we may turn to the allegory of the cave in the *Republic.* In his interpretation of it, Socrates defines education as a turning round (περιαγωγή) and a conversion (μεταστραφῆναι) of the eye of the soul (518d). Fixed on darkness and accustomed to contemplating mere shadows, which it mistakes for real objects, the inner eye is incapable of sustaining the light which emanates from the Idea of the Good. In order to be able to do so, it has to be 'turned round' – literally to be *converted* to the reality within. This metaphor with its specific phraseology remained crucial in the religious discourse of Hellenistic and later antiquity.

An Age of Converts

After Alexander's conquests there flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean a variety of philosophical schools, or αἱρέσεις (literally 'choices'), for this is how they were perceived by their founders and adherents, as life choices in the full meaning of the expression. The Stoics, the Epicureans, the Cynics and, eventually, the 'born again' Pythagoreans offered theoretical and practical guidance – a full training (or ἀγωγή) – towards a distinct way of life which could be led wherever one happened to find oneself in the brave new world of the Hellenistic monarchies. As a result of conscious deliberation, people would embrace the Cynic or the Epicurean, the Stoic or the Pythagorean way of living and dying. As well as offering a set of rules of behaviour for everyday existence and the emotional security of belonging to a like-minded community, or even a brotherhood, each one of these philosophies equipped its adepts with a world-view which provided a full set of answers to scholarly and metaphysical questions. On constant display in the open market of spirituality, to use a Lucianic image, these 'lives' awaited their customers.[4] Patrons came along, examined each item and bought what they thought suited them best. Then, after a time, some of them might feel dissatisfied with their purchase and, returning to the market, buy a different package and so on. What made this search possible was not only the physical existence of the philosophical School – the so-called διατριβή,[5] which functioned in the majority of the urban centres of the Greco-Roman world – but also the

[4] In his *Philosophical Lives for Sale* (βίων πρᾶσις), Lucian parodies the ways of living and thinking proposed by Pythagoras, the Cynic Diogenes, the Epicurean Aristippus, the Socratic Plato, the Peripatetics and the Stoics.

[5] The term διατριβή applies to a community of teachers and students who form an institution connected with a specific venue (e.g. the Academy, the Lyceum or the Stoa), as opposed to αἵρεσις which denotes the intellectual content of the philosophy in question. For an analysis of the terms in the context of the Athenian Schools with reference to

circulation of an abundant choice of propaganda literature advocating this or that way of life. In other words mission and proselytism, whether in a discreet or an aggressive form, were not foreign to the Hellenistic philosophical ethos. One may note in this context that before Christianity appeared as an organized movement, orality and writing were at the service of people's spiritual needs to meet an ever increasing demand.

The conversion from one thought-world to another within the margins of philosophy remained common practice well after Christianity was added to the other αἱρέσεις of the Hellenistic world, reaching its zenith in the Antonine period. The careers of Peregrinus and of Justin Martyr, as presented respectively in a polemical work and an autobiographical record, illustrate this point clearly.[6] Indeed the evidence for the motives of philosophical conversion is abundant. People indulged in spiritual sampling out of desperation, from social habit or as a way of fighting boredom. Conversion had become a fashion, one more consumer commodity, indeed a weapon against ennui within an atmosphere of extreme intellectual freedom, a freedom bordering on licence. As a keen observer of his society, Galen notes that in his day people converted to any one of the four major Hellenistic philosophies without knowing anything about the professed doctrines.[7] And in his longest dialogue, the *Hermotimus*, Lucian deplores the naiveté of the convert, and denounces the depravity of the converter, neither of whom has any real contact with what he is supposed to profess.[8] It is in the face of such frivolity that the stern voice of Epictetus is raised, demanding a protocol of conversion.

The Protocol of Conversion

A slave from Hierapolis in Phrygia, Epictetus found himself in Rome in the latter part of the first century AD, and eventually succeeded in becoming a disciple of the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, whose doctrine and method of imparting it to others he inherited. In Rome and in Nicopolis, where he eventually founded a school, Epictetus inspired in an inner circle of pupils the same adoration for his person and for the philosophy he taught that he himself had felt for his own master and his teaching. He preached that 'the philosopher's school is a doctor's surgery' (3.23.30), and expected his audience to emerge from it cured of the evils with which a bad education had burdened them. He demanded no less from his pupils than conversion to a new life, with all the agony, contrition and sense of

Greek and Latin sources (including inscriptions), see John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 162–92.

[6] See Lucian's *The Death of Peregrinus* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho.*

[7] Galen, *De ordine librorum suorum*, 19.50.4–13, Kühn.

[8] Lucian's *Hermotimus* is a systematic attempt at undermining the authority of Greek philosophy as a path which leads to moral improvement and spiritual perfection.

repentance involved in such an act: 'the philosopher has laid his healing hand on me; I should no longer behave like this' is what Epictetus wanted people to declare on leaving his lecture room (3.23.37).[9]

Let us turn once more to Lucian whose satires provide a guided tour of the social and, sometimes, the inner life of his contemporaries. To Peregrinus and Alexander, whose sham philosophy he exposes with uncommon vehemence, Lucian contrasts a genuine Cynic, Demonax of Athens, whose unpretentious philosophizing fills him with admiration and respect, and, more importantly, Nigrinus of Rome. The latter is a Platonist who, shunning all popularity, leads a life of retirement with Philosophy and Truth as his only companions (Lucian, *Nigr.* 18, cf. 2). Whether a historical figure or a figment of his biographer's imagination, Nigrinus is at the core of a conversion story which moves to tears an observer with whom Lucian seems to identify personally: 'for the effect he [the convert narrating his experience] produced in me was not superficial or casual. My wound was deep and vital and his words, shot with great accuracy, clove, if I may say so, my very soul in twain.'[10] The convert has emerged from his encounter with Nigrinus 'changed' – μεταβέβλησαι is his friend's astonished exclamation on meeting him (ibid. 1) – and he declares that his experience has left him a truly happy man (ἥκω σοι εὐδαίμων τε καὶ μακάριος γεγενημένος καὶ ... τρισόλβιος), one who has exchanged the life of a slave for that of a free man (ibid. 1). What interests us here is (a) that the behavioural transformation caused by the conversion experience is in itself sufficient to engender the strong reaction in the convert's interlocutor; and (b) that the narrative is treated as a pretext on the part of its chronicler for a discourse on the meaning of true conversion – an experience which, to his mind, few are able to attain: 'not everybody who hears the Phrygian flute goes frantic', concludes the convert; 'in like manner, not all who listen to philosophers go away divinely inspired and wounded' (ἔνθεοι καὶ τραυματίαι – ibid. 37).[11]

By contrast with the sober masters of Nicopolis and of Rome – Epictetus and Nigrinus – another teacher professed a revelatory faith. In one of the Hermetic treatises, known as the *Poimandres*, composed sometime in the second or third century AD, an anonymous prophet preaches a gospel of salvation to the masses. His message is dismissed by some and received with enthusiasm by others: 'and

[9] On Epictetus, his doctrine and methodology of teaching see A.A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford, 2002).

[10] Οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἐπιπολῆς οὐδ'ὡς ἔτυχεν ἡμῶν ὁ λόγος καθίκετο, βαθεῖα δὲ καὶ καίριος ἡ πληγὴ ἐγένετο, καὶ μάλα εὐστόχως ἐνεχθεὶς ὁ λόγος αὐτήν, εἰ οἷόν τε εἰπεῖν, διέκοψεν τὴν ψυχήν: Lucian, *Nigr.* 35, trans. A.M. Harmon, *Lucian*, vol. 1 (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, 1913), p. 135.

[11] For an analysis of the dialogue in the context of the remainder of Lucian's philosophical lives, see Diskin Clay, 'Lucian of Samosata: Four Philosophical Lives (Nigrinus, Demonax, Peregrinus, Alexander Pseudomantis)', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.36.5 (1992): pp. 3406–50.

some of them mocked me and stood aside, having given themselves up to the way of death, while others cast themselves at my feet and begged to be taught. I made them rise up and became a guide to humankind, teaching them the doctrine, how and in what way they should be saved'.[12] A community of 'the elect' is thus formed, a fraternity of people who turned their back on their previous existence to embrace a life of prayer and repentance.

According to an ideal whose exemplum is 'the road to Damascus', but which was also fostered by the philosopher and propagated by the prophet, conversion was understood as an emotional and intellectual upheaval caused by the intervention of an external force: the spiritual guide and/or his discourse. However, as both Epictetus and Lucian knew only too well, most people either lacked the mental and emotional stamina requisite for illumination, or were unable, through absence of true commitment, to persevere in the path opened up before them.[13] Yet, as the theatrical element inherent in the experience of conversion exerted an ineluctable fascination on a society increasingly bent on pouring out and dramatizing its feelings,[14] it was necessary for the majority, once they had espoused the fashionable cause of religious conversion, to disguise the fact that they had failed to attain the emotional climax claimed by a Paul or an Augustine.

Coercion versus Free Will

At this point in our argument one must emphasise that, whether genuine or affected, true or false, profound or superficial, the conversion to a new life within the context of Hellenistic philosophy, theosophy and religion resulted from an act of free will. Considerations of a non-spiritual order were often present in these choices, complicating the issue, but no external compulsion in the guise of brute force can be detected behind the change of mind – the μετάνοια – that precedes conversion in Hellenistic and early imperial times. A case in point in this connection is that of Tiberius Iulius Alexander, the nephew of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria. This rich and influential Jew renounced his native religion to the point of displaying, in his capacity as a Roman administrator, especial cruelty to the Jews.[15] We may speculate that what moved Tiberius Alexander

[12] *Poimandres* 1.29, A.D. Nock, *Corpus Hermeticum*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1945), p. 17.

[13] Celsus for one did not believe in the possibility of a παντελὴς μεταβολή (ap. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.66 and 69).

[14] On theatricality as a general trend of the period, J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 4–7, 230–42 and, more recently, Angelos Chaniotis, *Θεατρικότητα και δημόσιος βίος στον ελληνιστικό κόσμο* (Heracleion, 2009).

[15] Τοῖς πατρίοις οὐκ ἐνέμεινεν οὗτος ἔθεσιν: Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.100. For a full account of the career of this distinguished apostate, see E.G. Turner, 'Tiberius Iulius Alexander', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 44 (1954): pp. 54–64. For his philosophical position,

to take the final step of apostasy was stark political ambition rather than intellectual and social snobbery. One thing is certain however: nobody obliged him to convert. Whatever his social and psychological motivations, his decision was not the result of coercion.

Conversion, which in the Hellenistic world was a spontaneous process, but above all a private affair, dictated (even when aping[16] or self-interest can be obscurely detected at its root) by an inner urge, becomes increasingly, as from the third century, a state issue and consequently an essential accoutrement of one's public persona. In this development the mid-third century functions as a watershed, because it is then that palpable evidence for religion as a prerequisite of patriotism first emerges. It is at this point that the militant preaching of the one truth to the exclusion of any concurrent opinion, in a society which was growing tired of its own spiritual promiscuity, finds its ally in the authority of a central power willing and able to impose that truth by force. It is also at this time that refusal to conform to the rules of a compulsory state religion is first designated as a capital offence.[17]

The edict of Decius on sacrifice is a notable landmark in this hardening of attitudes. Admittedly the emperor's call on the citizen body to venerate the traditional gods for the safety of the state was not out of character with traditional behaviour patterns. What was novel in his initiative was the requirement that every single citizen should produce a certificate of sacrifice demonstrating that he had complied with the rules of what was now perceived as the state religion, and the consequent punishment of those who failed to bring proof of their piety. Christian self-obsession has identified this authoritarian act as the first systematic persecution of Christianity. But it was more than that. The fate of the Christians in this case (as that of the animals who were led to the sacrificial altar in their thousands) was merely collateral damage. The edict was not conceived as an act of aggression against any particular class or category of people within the empire. Indeed, since by the third century those who were ideologically opposed to bloody sacrifices came from many traditions, the edict did not exclusively hurt the religious sensibilities of the Christians; it offended just as much the Pythagoreans, the Hermeticists and any other group which had by that date articulated a discourse defending a 'mental' as opposed to a physical sacrifice.[18]

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see Monique Alexandre, 'Tiberius Iulius Alexander', in Richard Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* I (Paris, 1989), entry 102, pp. 118–20.

[16] Contemporaries were perfectly aware how widespread was the social phenomenon of mimicry: cf. the indignant cry of Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 9.37: Ἄλις τοῦ ... πιθηκισμοῦ.

[17] See my analysis in *Vers la pensée unique: la montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2010), pp. 43–65.

[18] Despite the tendency to attribute "the end of the sacrifice" exclusively to Jewish influences on the religious climate of late antiquity, the book of Guy Stroumsa, *La fin du*

When considered in all its dimensions, the edict of 249 amounts to a declaration of war against free will as such. One might even qualify it as the birth certificate of a new social and political order which prescribes, and eventually imposes, conformity with the state ideology, while encouraging, across the whole spectrum of society, behaviours stemming from negative sentiments. Once hatred acquires the status of a theological virtue, self-interest and fear, more than simple social conformism, become the main motivating forces behind conversion. This does not mean, of course, that the mid-third century saw the end of genuine religious conversions. It simply added the parameters of fear and hypocrisy to the motives behind a major trend in private and public life.[19]

Conversion and Apostasy

'Let that darkness be buried in oblivion!', the Emperor Julian was to exclaim with reference to his Christian past.[20] Conversion goes hand-in-hand with apostasy, and this dynamic couple fared well in a society in which rhetoric and theatricality constituted fundamental modes of expression. A central element in the conversion narratives of the Hermetic and other apocalyptic literature of the Hellenistic world, the dramatic abjuration of one's previous beliefs and ways had become codified in the Pauline experience.[21] Eventually, as enacted by the Church, the drama of conversion would comprise a first act consisting of a

sacrifice: Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive (Paris 2005), offers a good general picture of the changed spiritual landscape. For a more detailed analysis, see Anna Van den Kerchove, 'La voie d'Hermès, la question des sacrifices et les "cultes orientaux"' in Corinne Bonnet, Sergio Ribichini and Dirk Steuernagel (eds), *Religioni in contatto nel Mediterraneo Antico: Modalità di diffusione e processi di interferenza* (*Mediterranea* 4) (Pisa, Rome 2008), pp. 171–84 and Polymnia Athanassiadi & Constantin Macris, 'La philosophisation du religieux' in Corinne Bonnet & Laurent Bricault (eds), *Panthée: Religious transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire* (*RGRW* 177) (Leiden, 2013), pp. 41–83.

[19] A major landmark in the progress of religious coercion in the Roman Empire after Decius is represented by the reign of Justinian who could promulgate a law such as the following: 'Whether in Constantinople or in the provinces, those who have not received the sacrament of baptism should, together with their wives, children and entire household, present themselves in the most holy churches in order to learn the true faith of the Christians and, having received the teaching to the full, and having in purity divested themselves of their previous deception, become worthy of the salutary baptism. Or, if they think little of these things, they will have no part in our state nor will they be allowed to possess any moveable or immoveable property, but, giving up all of their goods, they will be left in indigence to suffer the suitable penalties' (*CJ* 1.11.10.1).

[20] Julian. *Or.* 11.131a, ed. C. Lacombrade, *L'Empereur Julien: œuvres complètes*, vol. 2.2 (Paris, 1964).

[21] In addition to the dramatic story of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:3–6, see the statement by Paul himself in 2 Thess. 2:3.

concatenation of anathemas hurled against real and imagined enemies, while to this day the repudiation of the devil constitutes a formal prerequisite of the mystery of baptism in the Orthodox rite.[22] In similar fashion, before turning to God, the pilgrim to Mecca has to ritually abjure the devil.

However, the full estrangement from one's previous self as the result of an inner illumination rarely occurs in real life, and no less rare is the sudden, dramatic change of mind that goes with it – what we would call for the purposes of this paper 'the ecstatic mode of conversion' – to which we would oppose the much more common 'gradual' or 'cumulative' mode. Adjustment to a new belief which informs an individual's entire thought-world is normally a slow, rationally achieved process. Owing more to interaction and fusion (or acculturation) than to rejection and exclusion, this pattern of conversion is the fruit of a cumulative process of intellectual, spiritual and emotional maturation.[23] Whether by a conscious process or unconsciously, important segments of the old personality survive, transformed or intact, within the new framework. Needless to stress that, as well as occurring in their pure form, the 'ecstatic' and the 'cumulative' conversion patterns are to be found in any number of combinations in the real world of Late Antiquity. It is with this knowledge, and while keeping at the back of our mind the constant interplay between free will and coercion, that we can now turn to the largely unexplored territory of Hellenism as a religious tradition, and look for converts both from without and from within its boundaries. My first example concerns a man from the provincial Egyptian town of Lycopolis.

A typical representative of the Hellenized urban classes of the Empire in the early third century, Plotinus spent most of his twenties in Alexandria going from teacher to teacher in an attempt to discover the ideal spiritual guide. This quest came to an end in his 28th year, on the day a friend took him to the circle of Ammonius Saccas. 'This is the man I was looking for', exclaimed Plotinus, in accordance with the rhetorical cliché current in his world. Yet in this case it was no mere rhetoric: for the next ten years he frequented a teacher who, like Socrates and Epictetus, never confided his message to writing.[24] Then, presumably on

[22] Abjuration of the previous creed, expressed in a series of anathemas, was deemed an essential part of any formal conversion: see Canon 8 of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787), ed. G. Alberigo et al., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, vol. 1 (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 328–9, and cf. Canons 7 of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) and 95 of the Quinisext Council (691), ibid., pp. 69–70 and 287–9. On the abjuration formulas imposed on Jewish converts to Christianity from the sixth to the eleventh century, see Gilbert Dagron, 'Le traité de Grégoire de Nicée sur le baptême des Juifs', in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris, 2010), pp. 313–57 at pp. 354–6, commenting on the Discourse of Gregory of Nicaea, 8–9 (text: ibid., pp. 325–9).

[23] This point is stressed by Neil McLynn in his postscript, 'Seeing and Believing: Aspects of Conversion from Antoninus Pius to Louis the Pious', in Mills and Grafton, *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 224–70 at pp. 238–40.

[24] For the narrative of this quest, see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3.6–17.

his master's death, he left the city where he had experienced illumination and spent the rest of his life teaching and practising what Ammonius had revealed to him. Though extremely reticent in talking about his past, as his pupil and biographer asserts, Plotinus seemed to delight in recounting how he discovered the spiritual guide whose precepts and method he was to follow and transmit to others.[25] Here we have a combination of the two patterns of conversion – the ecstatic and the gradual. Plotinus did not abjure the thought-world in which he had been brought up, but came to perceive it in an altered perspective.

My second case is an equally famous one. Having escaped at the age of five from the dynastic massacre in which most of the male members of his family were exterminated, Julian was brought up in the Christian faith, as befitted a nephew of Constantine. Yet, as he confesses on the opening page of one of his theological writings, a mystical longing for the unknown had tormented him ever since his adolescence.[26] Like Plotinus, Julian was searching for something that he could not name, but of which he had an intuitive inkling. Hearing at the age of twenty about the theurgical feats performed by Maximus of Ephesos, he dashed to meet him in the certainty that this was the master who could reveal to him the object of his adolescent longing.[27] And he was not disappointed. Under the influence of his spiritual guide, Julian rejected Christianity wholesale and devoted himself with uncommon fervour to a new creed and way of life. As with Plotinus, the enthusiastic cry on his part, 'this is the man I was looking for' is no literary cliché, but the culmination of an arduous, though fumbling, search. Unlike Plotinus, however, Julian found it impossible to integrate much of his intellectual and spiritual heritage into his new worldview: he had to excise it as evil and attack it with all the means at his imperial disposal.[28]

Contrary to what Christian triumphalist accounts would have us believe, the influence of Julian's anti-Christian discourse was long-lived. Three generations after his death, Cyril of Alexandria was to spend more than a decade on the task of refuting the emperor's polemical work *Against the Galileans*. His arguments 'were shaking the faith of many, wronging beyond measure [the Christian cause]'. The superficial and the credulous were the obvious victims of the Julianic discourse, but even those entrenched in the faith risked being persuaded by it, as Cyril explained to Theodosius II, to whom he dedicated the ten books

[25] Ibid. 31–2: αὐτὸς ἀφ'ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις πολλάκις διηγεῖτο.

[26] Ἐντέτηκέ μοι δεινὸς ἐκ παίδων τῶν αὐγῶν τοῦ θεοῦ πόθος: *Or.* 11.130c, ed. Lacombrade, *L'Empereur Julien: œuvres complètes*, vol. 2.2 (Paris, 1964).

[27] See previous note and Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* 7.2.12, ed. Giangrande, *Vitae Sophistarum* (Rome, 1956); cf. Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Julian: An Intellectual Biography* (2nd ed., London, 1992), p. 33.

[28] Julian's enthusiasm for Hellenism inspired in him true hatred for his previous faith, which he attacked both on theoretical grounds (cf. his *Against the Galileans*) and in more individualized ways (cf. *Ep.* 86, ed. and trans. J. Bidez, *L'Empereur Julien: œuvres complètes*, vol. 1.2 (Paris, 1960), 2nd edn).

of his anti-Julianic work.[29] Independent evidence from late fifth-century Alexandria confirms Cyril's apprehensions: the fashionable establishment of the rhetor Horapollo was such a hotbed of conversion to Hellenism that its head was nicknamed Psychapollo – the destroyer of souls.[30] Closely linked with this notorious school was the regenerated Academy of Athens, to which we will now turn.

The Milieu of Damascius

Despite the fragmentary condition in which it has reached us, the *Philosophical History*, composed in the early sixth century by the last head of the Academy of Athens, is a mine of information for what concerns us here. In it Damascius draws the portrait of three generations of pagan intellectuals, offering valuable clues to the background, spiritual horizon and comportment of several converts to Hellenism. The Alexandrian Zeno, for example, renounced his native Judaism:

> in the traditional manner, namely by driving a white ass through their so-called Synagogue on the Sabbath. This Zeno was by nature a decent and pious man, but rather sluggish in the arts and the sciences, always seeking knowledge and asking questions about matters of which he was ignorant, but remaining ignorant of virtually everything. For he was extremely slow in understanding, and when he finally understood something he quickly lost it again through forgetfulness. (*PH* fr. 67.)

Damascius' comments are probably more revealing of his own (and his circle's) prejudices towards a Jewish upbringing than of the intellectual abilities of Zeno himself. Yet, whatever the case may have been, what comes across clearly from the fragment quoted above is that the convert adhered to his new faith freely and full-heartedly, with an enthusiasm which remained unabated.

Among the kaleidoscopic collection of figures in Damascius' panorama, we may single out for our purposes two characters: a committed godfearer (θεοσεβής) and a Samaritan convert. Theosebius (whose very name bears testimony to his allegiance) 'had, more than any man [Damascius] had ever met, the power of looking directly into men's souls' (*PH* fr. 45B). But before

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[29] Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum*, prol. 4, ed. P. Burguière and P. Evieux, *Cyrille d'Alexandrie, Contre Julien*, vol. 1 (SCh 322, Paris 1985) (= PG 76, col.508).

[30] On Horapollo's set-up, see Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Severi*, ed. and trans. M.-A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère, par Zacharie le Scholastique*, PO 2 (Paris, 1904), trans. Sebastian Brock and Brian Fitzgerald, *Two Early Lives of Severos, Patriarch of Antioch* (Liverpool, 2013), and cf. Damascius, *The Philosophical History: Text with Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. P. Athanassiadi (Athens, 1999), pp. 20–36 (henceforth *PH*).

introducing this interesting individual in his own person, let us say a few words about his cultic identity.

A creed somewhere between Jewish and pagan monotheism, the syncretistic cult of the godfearers (θεοσεβεῖς) was practiced by a far from negligible minority in the Hellenistic East, as a wealth of inscriptional evidence testifies. The lapidary testimony left by the worshippers themselves is complemented by the Christian polemical discourse on their beliefs and habits.[31] But in Damascius we come across a real person. His sympathetic analysis of the works and days of Theosebius is there to remind us that the godfearers were individuals active in various milieus, within which their syncretistic baggage of belief and practice underwent a number of influences and influenced others in their turn. An assiduous pupil of Hierocles, the fifth-century philosopher and martyr of Hellenism, Theosebius took down systematic (and, it would appear, intelligent) notes of his lectures on Plato.[32] In another passage Damascius testifies to his selective fidelities:

> Much of what the philosopher Theosebius said came from the school of Epictetus, but he also fashioned concepts in accordance with the ethos of his own Muse ... Accordingly he left his admonitions in writing, like those of Epictetus in earlier times. And it seems to me that if you compare the two men he is very much the Epictetus of our own time except that he did not follow the Stoic doctrine. For there was nothing that Theosebius welcomed and admired more than Plato's truth. (*PH* fr. 46D.)

In accordance with the philosophical ethos of post-Hellenistic times, Theosebius was an adept of Platonic metaphysics and of Stoic ethics. An ascetic in his private life, he was actively engaged in social work, helping others and improving them morally. 'His life of virtue was by no means a quiet one, exerted only in imaginary labours, but a life sufficiently involved with action' (*PH* fr. 46D). On one occasion, he undertook to exorcise the demon inhabiting a woman, 'though he understood nothing of magic nor had he ever been versed in theurgy'. It was simply by invoking the rays of Helios and the god of the Jews that he succeeded in his

[31] For an analysis, see Stephen Mitchell, 'The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians', in Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism*, pp. 92–121. An ongoing argument as to the spiritual identity of the dedicators to Theos Hypsistos continues between Stephen Mitchell and Nicole Belayche: their latest contributions to the debate are Belayche, '*Deus deum ... summorum maximus* (Apuleius): ritual expressions of distinction in the divine world in the imperial period', in Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen (eds), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 141–66 and Mitchell, 'Further thoughts on the cult of Theos Hypsistos', ibid., pp. 167–208.

[32] On Theosebius as an attentive listener to Hierocles' lectures, *PH* 45A. On Hierocles' savage treatment by the powers-that-be in Byzantium, ibid. 45B.

salutary task (*PH* fr. 46B), a circumstance which provides conclusive evidence for Theosebius as a typical godfearer.[33]

Through Damascius' description, Theosebius emerges as a creature of flesh and blood, an active, benevolent man with a multiple spiritual identity. Not only is he comfortable with himself, but his exceptional understanding of Plato makes him accepted as one of their own by the leading lights of the textual community that was the Academy. A similar case is that of Marinus, a Samaritan convert to Hellenism, who was chosen by Proclus as his successor. Let us turn once more to the testimony of Damascius, who studied the mathematical sciences with Marinus at the Athenian Academy:

> Marinus, the successor of Proclus, originated from Neapolis in Palestine, a city founded near the so-called Mount Argarizos, where there is a most sacred temple of Zeus the most high, to whom Abraham the ancestor of the ancient Jews was consecrated, as Marinus himself used to say. Born a Samaritan, Marinus renounced their creed (which is anyway an innovation [καινοτομία] from Abraham's religion) and embraced Hellenism.[34]

How, when and why Marinus abjured his native Samaritanism is a subject for speculation. However, by combining the information provided by Damascius with what we know about Samaritanism in the second half of the fifth century, we may construct a scenario of conversion which is probably not far from reality.[35]

Born around 450 in Neapolis (Nablus) at the foot of Mount Argarizos (Gerizim), Marinus came from the very heartland of Samaritanism. He grew up with the precepts of a religion that was literal, ritualistic and above all, in the belief of its adepts, primary; as Marinus continued to aver long after his abjuration, Samaritanism was consistent with the strict monotheism of Abraham, by contrast with Judaism which constituted a betrayal of it. Prominent among his first memories would have been the stream of pilgrims from all over the great Samaritan diaspora ascending the holy mountain three times a year to worship the one and only God.[36] A sickly and timid figure, according to his biographer,

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[33] For beliefs and rituals professed by fifth-century godfearers, see Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, 3.92 (PG 68, 281B-C).

[34] *PH* fr. 97A: ἀπετάξατο μὲν πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνων δόξαν ... τὰ δὲ Ἑλλήνων ἠγάπησεν.

[35] For an analogous attempt, concerning the intellectual/spiritual itinerary of Justin Martyr, see Rebecca Lyman, 'The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr's Conversion as a Problem of "Hellenization"', in Mills and Grafton, *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 36–60.

[36] As from the late second century BC the Samaritans constructed their own identity as an alternative Judaism, a development which reached its peak with the great reformer

Marinus grew up in 'little Damascus'[37] during a time of great internecine religious strife and political violence, which was to reach its climax in the Samaritan revolt of 484.[38] While trying to remain true to the monistic ideal of his traditional faith, he sought an escape route from the violence which surrounded him in his home town and discovered it in the spiritual way that another Semite, Iamblichus of Chalcis, had constructed out of the heritage of Hellenism.[39] In Athens, under Proclus, the young man followed the educational curriculum that confirmed him in a new faith. How this conversion was effected we do not know, yet if one considers the elements which attracted Marinus to Hellenism, one may conclude that the way in which he approached his new allegiance was determined by the fundamentals of his native faith. What fascinated him in Hellenism was its achievement in the area of logic. He taught Aristotle's fundamental doctrines as well as arithmetic and geometry, and composed an *Introduction to Euclid's Elements* which is still extant.[40]

'Judging from his discourse and from his writings (which are few anyway)', Damascius dryly remarks (*PH* fr. 97F), 'Marinus did not reap the deep furrow of ideas from which shoots forth the wise contemplation of the true nature of beings'. This crushing statement, in his pupil's elaborate Greek, about a Platonic Successor's lack of understanding in metaphysical matters is complemented by the following:

> Through hard work and tireless effort, Marinus succeeded in burying with his own name the reputations of many people more gifted and also older than himself (*PH* fr. 97C).

In line with his Samaritan background, Marinus' interpretation of the key Platonic texts was over-literal. His down-to-earth approach shocked the gurus of the sect, including his own pupils – Isidore and Damascius – who succeeded in terrorizing him to the point that he had to burn his own commentaries.[41]

Baba Rabba in the third century AD. On the history of Samaritanism, Alan D. Crown (ed.), *The Samaritans* (Tubingen, 1989).

[37] This is the compliment that the tenth-century geographer Mukaddasi pays to Nablus: see James A. Montgomery, *The Samaritans, the Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1907), p. 18.

[38] On this and subsequent Samaritan revolts, see Crown, *The Samaritans*, pp. 71–6.

[39] See Polymnia Athanassiadi, 'De Jamblique à Damascius: la dimension syrienne du platonisme', in Delphine Lauritzen and Michel Tardieu (eds), *Le voyage des légendes. Hommages à Pierre Chuvin* (Paris, 2013), pp. 363–82.

[40] *Euclidis Opera Omnia*, ed. I.L. Heiberg and H. Menge, vol. 6 (Leipzig, 1896).

[41] Wondering whether he should publish a long commentary he had written on the *Philebus*, Marinus submitted it to Isidore for a critical reading, and when the latter, 'after going through it carefully ... merely said that the master's commentary on the dialogue was quite sufficient, Marinus understood his meaning and immediately burned the book' (*PH* fr. 38A). A similar incident occurred in connection with his exegesis of the *Parmenides*,

Thus Marinus' achievement in his chosen milieu went hand in hand with his own awareness of being if not exactly a failure, at least a misfit, albeit a highly successful one in outward form, if not in essence. But the irony of his fate was that, during the power struggle over Proclus' succession, he found himself – at least in his own judgement – entangled in the type of violence he had shunned in his native land. In the words of Damascius, 'as he suspected that plots were directed against his very life, Marinus departed from Athens to Epidaurus' (*PH* fr. 101C), presumably in search of supernatural assistance.

The Samaritan background of the convert is even more clearly detectable in the *Life* he has left of his master, Proclus, who seems also to have been his converter. If so, this may have constituted the main reason why the aging Proclus chose him as his successor, when so many other more obvious candidates had declared their interest in the race.[42] To the careful reader, the *Life* is loaded with autobiographical clues, the most salient of which are the following:

1. An analysis, degree by degree, of the *scala virtutum* as ascended by Proclus. Even if Marinus himself never reached the highest level represented by the paradigmatic or theurgical virtues, his prescriptive text reads very much like an initiatory programme proposed by one who has practised it for his own benefit.
2. The narrative about Proclus' self-imposed exile appears as a parallel of Marinus' own experience.[43]
3. The emphasis on the practical aspects of Proclus' achievement, and the insistence on the value of ritual, as exemplified by various anecdotes from Proclus' career, are revealing of Marinus' own roots in a religion in which orthopraxy was all-important.
4. Finally, as well as a record of Marinus' own conversion, this elegant hagiography (whose alternative title is significantly enough *On happiness*) also reads as a propaganda text, a protreptic oration written by one who had found his own salvation in a specific milieu and was now embarking on a missionary undertaking in the hope of converting others.

The most fascinating parts of the *Philosophical History* are nevertheless those in which Damascius narrates his own conversion. All the elements of a highly dramatic change of mind are there: first, we meet the converter in the person of an unconventional teacher; there follows the total rejection on the part of the

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the theological dialogue par excellence in Neoplatonic circles, where Marinus again opted for a literal, rather than a spiritual interpretation, as Isidore told him in no uncertain terms (ibid. 97J).

[42] On the struggle for the succession to Proclus, see *PH* frs 97K, 98, 99, 100, 101 with commentary and pp. 42–44 of the Introduction.

[43] See Marinus, *Proclus* 15.14–35, ed. and trans. H. D. Saffrey and A.-Ph. Segonds, *Proclus, ou Sur le Bonheur* (Paris, 2002), and cf. *PH* fr. 101C.

convert of his previous life and career; and, finally, we see him serve his new vocation with absolute devotion. Sometime around 490, at the age of thirty or so, Damascius took the decision to abandon the superficial discipline of rhetoric and devote himself wholeheartedly to philosophy:

> How pernicious an activity was rhetoric, focusing all my attention on the mouth and the tongue and turning it away from the soul and from the blissful and divine lessons which purify it! Realizing this, I sometimes broke off from the rhetorical exegeses with which I had been occupying myself for nine years. (*PH* fr. 137B)

Here was someone torn between rhetoric and philosophy in a way that would have been understood by Gregory of Nazianzos or by Augustine of Hippo. Arriving in Athens in the company of his mentor and converter, Damascius applied himself to the Neoplatonic curriculum of studies, as Marinus had done before him, and some twenty years later he was ready not only to assume the direction of the Academy, but more importantly to redefine the institution and enhance its international prestige.

As an act of homage to the man who converted him to philosophy, Damascius wrote *The Life of Isidore*, a complex work to which he gave the alternative title *Philosophical History*. This critical appraisal of the pagan intellectual scene between the late fourth and the early sixth century, which survives only in fragmentary form, has nevertheless a clear enough structure to allow several themes to emerge from the mass of debris. And what stands out with indisputable clarity is that the true villain in the author's mental universe is rhetoric. Through the use of anecdote and meticulous analysis, the convert launches a virulent attack on the discipline he formally abjured when he devoted himself to the philosophical life. For him – as for the Emperor Julian in his *Edict on Education* – a rhetorical culture divorced from the religious core of Hellenism was the enemy within the walls.[44] For Damascius, beauty of speech becomes the veil which conceals the essence of religion, as he comments in his 'conversion statement'. What is most poignant though in his case is that he spent the rest of his long life writing beautiful Greek and increasingly despising himself for doing so. The tension in his writings between the aesthetics of the discourse and its essence is at times unbearable.

'As regards this discourse too' – he says interrupting himself in the middle of a complicated philosophical exposition – 'this is the thing for which it should be praised: that it despises itself and confesses itself blinded by that united, intelligible light, and utterly incapable of staring at it'.[45]

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[44] See Julian *Ep.* 61, ed. and trans. J. Bidez, *L'Empereur Julien: œuvres complètes*, vol. 1.2 (Paris, 1960), 2nd edn.

[45] Damascius, *De primis principiis*, ed. L. G. Westerink, *Traité des premiers principes*, 3 vols (Paris, 1986–91), vol. 3, p. 141, ll. 16–19.

Is this rhetoric? Is Damascius' constant complaint against 'the narrow particularism of words' (*De princ.* vol. 2, p. 59, ll. 19–20) a rhetorical device? Probably not. What is certain however is that Damascius' deepest self was marked as much by his professional past as by his rejection of it. Incapable of solving the conflict, he advanced beyond the apophatic philosophy of his day and, transcending negation itself, he ended up, like the mystics in the Christian and the Islamic tradition, by advocating a theology of silence – ἀφασία.[46] But let us go back in time in order to meet two men with very different preoccupations than the ones which tormented the last head of the Academy of Athens.

Two Unusual Bishops: Synesius of Cyrene and Pegasius of Ilion

Synesius of Cyrene did not face the particular dilemmas which tormented Damascius. In a work half-way between the autobiographical and the protreptic genre, which takes as its model Dio Chrysostom, he defends the perfect unity of the Hellenic *paideia*. Contrary to Damascius, Synesius holds a holistic, albeit hierarchical, view of Hellenism, with philosophy ideally crowning a lifetime's cultural achievement.[47] To his mind, the accomplished intellectual is at once a swan and an eagle – a gifted orator, capable of seducing his audience, and a highbrow philosopher, who strives in the solitude of contemplation to reach union with God (*Dio* 11.6).

A life devoted to the Muses does not however prevent the philosopher from occupying himself with the affairs of the terrestrial city. Following the example of Dio, Synesius saw it as a duty, imposed on him as much by noble birth and social status as by his Platonic training, to serve the community. He did so in a number of ways, one of which involved his acceptance, after considerable hesitation, of the archbishopric of Cyrenaica. Realizing only too well that in the changed world of the fifth century the best way to exert authority as a public figure was through Church office, Synesius finally acquiesced, though, as he wrote both before and after his enthronement, he 'would have preferred a thousand deaths to the priesthood'.[48]

Embarking on the 'revolution' (καινοτομία) which transformed his life around his fortieth year, Synesius did not sacrifice any of the essentials of his ideology and way of life: along with his wife and his hunting habits, he retained

[46] See Polymnia Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: de Numénius à Damascius* (Paris, 2006), pp. 208–13. Faced with his failure to describe the unitive experience of the mystic, Damascius ends up in a 'helpless silence': σιγὴ ἀμήχανος (*De primis principiis*, vol. 1, p. 21, ll. 20–21).

[47] For a few examples, *Dio* 4.3; 5.1, 3, 5; 9.1; 15.5, ed. and trans. J. Lamoureux and N. Aujoulat, *Synésios de Cyrène. Opuscules I* (Paris, 2004), pp. 140–85.

[48] *Ep.* 96, ll. 2-3 ed. A. Garzya, trans. D. Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène: Correspondance*, 2 vols (Paris, 2000), cf. *Ep.* 11, ll. 4–5.

his Platonic theological beliefs against the Christian dogmas of the resurrection of the body, the non-preexistence of the soul and the end of the world, all three of which, to his mind, were fables for the masses.[49] What he defines as a καινοτομία in his life is the assumption of a package of administrative responsibilities, which he shouldered to the best of his ability, while finding them excessively onerous.[50] As a result of this change in his status, he continually complained both to his friends and to his inferiors within the ecclesiastical hierarchy that life was 'unlivable' when deprived of the leisure of philosophical contemplation.[51]

As Ilinca Tanaseanu-Doebler persuasively argues in a recent book, if one had questioned Synesius about his identity, he would have answered that he was a philosopher and that his initiator to this worldview was Hypatia of Alexandria.[52] To him the holy book par excellence was the divinely revealed collection of the *Chaldean Oracles*, as is obvious from his treatment of it in his theological hymns and his oneirological essay, while the one truly charismatic presence in his life was his teacher, on whom he constantly professed his intellectual and emotional dependence. As Isidore was *the* philosopher for Damascius, so Hypatia was for Synesius.[53] A 'most divine soul' (*Ep.* 10, l. 13), Hypatia was 'the sacred retreat of goodness' (ἀγαθὸν ἄσυλον, *Ep.* 81, l. 15) and the very locus of a patriotic attachment more passionate than anything terrestrial could ever inspire in Synesius.[54] Indeed among the factors which led to his death soon after the assumption of the bishopric one should count the silence which Hypatia maintained despite her pupil's renewed appeals for a sign of recognition.[55]

Whereas the Cappadocians (and even Origen) can be said to have a Christian identity on to which they grafted Greek culture, for Synesius it was not even the other way round: Christianity appears as no more than an accidental stage – indeed a misfortune – in his career with no real connection with his intellectual universe. The episcopate represents a necessary evil through which he can put his programme of social justice to practical application. Having assumed it, he does not see his life as a contradiction nor does he consider his occupation of

[49] *Ep.* 105 (to his brother), ll. 69–75, 85–90, 112–16. Cf. the famous statements in the same letter: τὰ μὲν οἴκοι φιλοσοφῶ, τὰ δ'ἔξω φιλόμυθός εἰμι διδάσκων (ll. 99–100); also τὴν μὲν ἀλήθειαν τῶν θείων ἀπόρρητον εἶναι δεῖ, τὸ δὲ πλῆθος ἑτέρας ἕξεως δεῖται (ll. 105–6).

[50] Μεταβολὴ τοῦ βίου or καινοτομία τοῦ βίου: *Ep.* 79, l. 111; *Ep.* 41, ll. 137–8.

[51] For βίος ἀβίωτος see *Ep.* 11, l. 17; cf. *Epp.*10 and 16.

[52] Ilinca Tanaseanu-Doebler, *Konversion zur Philosophie in der Spätantike: Kaiser Julian und Synesios von Kyrene* (Stuttgart, 2008).

[53] Cf. *Epp.* 15; 81; 124; 154. In *Ep.* 137, ll. 8–9, Hypatia is described as γνησία καθηγεμὼν τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων; in *Ep.* 16, l. 2, she is addressed as 'mother, sister and teacher'. She is 'the blessed master' (δέσποινα μακαρία) of *Ep.* 10, who had to approve for publication the treatises written by her pupil: *Ep.* 154.

[54] As stated in *Ep.* 124, ll. 12–13: διὰ σέ μοι δοκῶ μόνην ὑπερόψεσθαι τῆς πατρίδος.

[55] *Ep.* 16; and see the dejected and angry tone of the concluding line of Ep. 16, ll. 16–18: τῶν ἐμῶν εἴ τί σοι μέλει, καλῶς ποιεῖς· εἰ δὲ μὴ μέλει, οὐδὲν ἐμοὶ τούτου μέλει.

an episcopal see as a betrayal of his deepest beliefs. He is comfortable with his conscience and, whereas his love of rhetoric and poetry has to be explained and fitted in with the philosopher's vocation,[56] Christianity is a thing apart, which seems to have no place in Synesius' mental and emotional universe.

My last example concerns a much less famous bishop than Synesius. To meet him we have to return to the mid-fourth century. When in the 350s the young cousin of the Emperor Constantius visited Troy, he was taken round the city's antiquities by the most important person in the locality, Bishop Pegasius. The bishop impressed Julian with his highly civilized manner and above all with his respectful attitude towards the pagan monuments of the site. Pegasius might have been aware of Julian's pagan sympathies; or he may have belonged to the no man's land between Hellenism and Christianity; or he may have been an agnostic in theological matters, but also an aesthete attached to the beauty of traditional art;[57] or, finally, he may have been, as Julian wants to believe, a deeply pious pagan who had found an effective way of protecting the religious heritage of the creed that he revered. We cannot know for certain, but what is significant for our purposes is that he impressed the prince as being a crypto-pagan. And when a few years later as Emperor and *pontifex maximus* Julian organized his own church, he appointed Pegasius to a priesthood. This nomination shocked quite a number of people and Julian had to justify it. In a letter to a member of his clergy he wrote the following:

> Would I have appointed Pegasius a priest if I had any evidence of impiety towards the gods on his part? Well, if in the past, whether out of thirst for power [εἴτε δυναστείας ὀρεγόμενος] or, as he has often asserted to me, in order to save the temples of the gods, he clad himself in those rags, he only pretended to be impious so far as the name of the thing went. Indeed it is clear that he never injured any temple anywhere except for what amounted to a few stones, and that was as a blind, that he might be able to save the rest.[58]

History does not record whether, after Julian's death, Pegasius reconverted to Christianity. But even if he failed to assume his episcopal duties for a second term, his case is far from unusual. Byzantine history abounds in examples of crypto-pagan bishops and patriarchs. The issue of dissimulation goes hand in hand with coercion, and coercion is the policy to which the Byzantine state had

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[56] This is the function of *Dio*, a work purely apologetic in nature.

[57] It is important to stress here that there is nothing anachronistic in assigning such an attitude to a fourth-century person: in addition to the speeches of Libanius, one may adduce the evidence of the law: see in this connection Claude Lepelley, 'Le musée des statues divines', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 42 (1994), pp. 5–15.

[58] *Ep.* 79 *ad fin.* ed. Bidez; trans. W.C. Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3 (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA, 1923), pp. 53–5, slightly altered.

increasing recourse in religious matters.[59] The concluding argument of Julian in his long letter on Pegasius points in this direction, throwing full light on the emperor's missionary disposition:

> If we drive away those who come to us of their own free will, no one will be ready to heed when we summon!

Conclusions

1. The Conversion Framework

The emergence of Christianity as a prophetic religion in the globalized world of the Greco-Roman East does not seem initially to have disrupted its rhythms of thought and norms of behaviour. Landing as it did in an atmosphere of intense intellectual curiosity and spiritual tolerance, the message of Paul was welcomed by a wide variety of individuals and groups, and integrated as much within the vertical continuum of Hellenistic philosophical religion as in the horizontal continuum of religious pluralism. However, by intensifying certain trends and by marginalizing others, Christianity worked towards the mutation of the social and political ethos of the world in which it had made its appearance. Thus belief in a single path to salvation in combination with activities of a missionary-proselytizing nature (neither of which was a totally unknown trend in Hellenistic society) achieved wide currency, as the concept of the interchangeability and even convergence of paths leading towards the same ultimate goal began to lose credibility.[60] Eventually, the Christian insistence on exclusive adherence to its own thought-world resulted in policies of persecution, which, in turn, encouraged on the one hand the practice of martyrdom and on the other behavioural patterns inspired by dissimulation and hypocrisy. Central to the new message was the notion of conversion as an act of no return. Conceived as a complete emptying of the self from any previous belief and habit in order to receive the new spirit (and the life-choice of the anchorite offers a striking illustration of this attitude),

[59] For an analysis of this theme, see Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Vers la pensée unique. La montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2010), pp. 56–121.

[60] The naturalness with which, in his trial for magic, Apuleius tells his judges of the *pleraque initia* in which he had participated (*Apol.* 55.8), points to the everyday character of such multiple initiations and allegiance (*nihil insolitum, nihil incognitum dico*: ibid.). When, two centuries later, in conversation with Pope Damasus, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus is reported to have said: 'make me bishop of Rome and I will immediately convert to Christianity' (Jerome, *Contra Iohannem* 8), this joke, coming as it does from an important political figure who was at the same time an initiate into a multitude of mysteries and the priest of several cults, is a biting criticism of the spirit of intolerance displayed by the Christians.

conversion to Christianity was seen as a defining experience sealed with the ritual of baptism.

The notion of the sudden revelation of a rational or mystical truth, brought about by the action of a charismatic personality who functions as the catalyst in a long process of search and experimentation, was – as A.D. Nock has shown in his seminal book[61] – far from foreign to the Hellenistic world. Indeed it was so common that it provided the satirist with a background for illustrating the social and aesthetic sins of trivialization and aping.[62] But in the pre-Christian world the recognition of the truth – and the eventual change in self-consciousness and social comportment – did not entail the wholesale rejection of the convert's intellectual baggage: it only meant moving house without getting rid of one's furniture, so to speak – merely re-arranging it as would best fit its new surroundings. In the image of the world around him, the convert lived in greater or lesser harmony with his own past and with his social environment.

Boundaries between the various systems or traditions of the Hellenistic world certainly existed, but they were there to be crossed and re-crossed at will. Indeed one of the principles of the pluralistic spirituality that this world had enjoyed was that of the essential compatibility of the many paths which led to the same goal.[63] Eclectic affiliations, shared loyalties and multiple identities were the norm in the spiritual domain, as exemplified by Numenius of Apamea, who accommodated Judaism and Christianity within his personal mélange of Pythagorean Platonism. What Christianity (in line with Judaism) postulated was a sense of exclusive spiritual loyalty which thrived on contempt and rejection.[64] By this token negation, hatred, defection and betrayal acquired the status of theological virtues.

Thus Christianity constructed its conversion discourse around the contrast – indeed the dichotomy – between a universe of grace and salvation and what lies outside its gates (ἔξωθεν and θύραθεν). In a world in which the norm was the cohabitation, interaction and synthesis of spiritual traditions, it advocated polarity, which in turn engendered tension and conflict, both physical and emotional, in the individual soul and in society at large. Eventually the either/or proposition of the Christians was to infiltrate the mentality of those who had been singled out as the enemy, thus leading to the failure of pluralism within

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[61] A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford, 1933).

[62] On the theme of philosophical identity as a pretext for eccentric behaviour, see Alciphron, *Letters of Parasites*, 19. On mimicry, see above, n. 16.

[63] The classic formulation of this principle comes in Symmachus' appeal to Valentinian II in *Relatio* 3.10: *uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum*; a sentence which by the late fourth century has a strikingly old-fashioned air.

[64] Point driven home with exceptional vehemence by Jan Assmann, 'Monotheism and polytheism', in Sarah Iles Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 17–31 and *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt* (Vienna, 2006).

its own milieu. People were progressively won over to an antagonistic vision of their own lives, viewing the past and the present, tradition and society as a theatre for conflict. The quest for orthodoxy became the norm, as the quarrels among the Neoplatonists show only too well. By reaction or osmosis (which in the end comes to the same) the representatives of Hellenism developed an attitude of aggression not only towards their own contemporaries within and without the School, but also when reviewing their own cultural heritage.[65]

2. From the General to the Particular

How do the seven personalities who lived between the third and the sixth century fit into this framework? In the process of their conversion, how seriously – or indeed consciously – did they take the existence of ideological and cultural boundaries and barriers?

In Plotinus' case the meeting with Ammonius was catalytic; in him he recognized the man who held the key to the true meaning of the culture in which he himself had been brought up. The flash of recognition ignited in the pupil the desire for ἐπιστροφὴ πρὸς ἑαυτόν – the Greek term for *conversio* – which in his case was a life-long process followed consistently and with absolute conviction. His quietly built sense of mission fully accorded with the Greek philosophical ethos: far from seeking to impose his knowledge on others, Plotinus restricted his teaching to those who came to him of their own volition. On the other hand he could not restrain his anger when those who to his mind misunderstood the fundamental texts on which divinization rested came to his circle and attempted to convert his pupils to their own view of Platonism.[66]

More than one hundred years later, Julian was born into a very different world and milieu from those of Plotinus. Imbued from the start with the psychology of boundaries, he had a jubilant experience of conversion as an irreversible crossing of a frontier. However his sense of liberation and joy was inhibited by the burden of fear, dissimulation and pretence that at this stage he had to bear. When freedom dawned at last, he could give public expression to his private hatred of Christianity and, from his Iamblichan position of combat, he launched a

[65] Thesis developed in Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie*, *passim*.

[66] *Enneads* 2.9 = 33. Henri-Charles Puech and E.R. Dodds had already toyed with the idea that Plotinus had been seduced by Gnosticism. Recently, however, there has been an attempt to present Plotinus as an adept of Sethian Gnosticism, the main exponent of this view being Alexander Masur: cf. *inter alia* his unpublished doctoral dissertation 'The Platonizing Sethian Gnostic Background of Plotinus' Mysticism' (University of Chicago, 2010). This argument is propounded by reading the odd passage out of context and interpreting it in the light of Gnostic ideology of which, as is well known, Plotinus was a sworn enemy (on this, Athanassiadi, *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie*, pp. 123–44). For a balanced overview, see Gregory Shaw, 'Eros and Arithmos: Pythagorean theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus', *Ancient Philosophy*, 19 (1999): pp. 121-43 at pp. 124–5.

series of programmatic attacks against the Judaic heresy of the Galileans. To him boundaries had an almost physical reality: Hellenism lay beyond Christianity and any process of acculturation was a betrayal of its spirit, as he stated in his Law on Education, which defended the unity of Greek *paideia* as a perfectly self-contained cultural and religious phenomenon and, logically enough, prohibited its use by the enemy (*Ep.* 61 Bidez).

For Damascius, in the late fifth century, the sense of intractable boundaries was even more real than it had been for any of his predecessors. His conviction of the incompatibility between the spiritual and the technical in Hellenism stemmed from the same premise as the logic of his contemporary monks who were opting for the desert and rejecting culture and historical memory. Paradoxically his ideal interlocutor would have been the Tatian of the *Ad Graecos*, and, more predictably, the Islamic mystic who worshipped God in silence.

Yet, even in Damascius' very circle, not everybody fell victim to the rigidity of the times. Theosebius who, to judge by his name, must have been reared in a family of god-fearers, is a prime example of a 'cumulative convert'. While preserving the beliefs and practices of his home religion intact, he went through life collecting loyalties and identities: Epictetus remained his model of daily behaviour, and Plato, when read in the light of the teachings of the *Chaldean Oracles*, was the mystagogue.[67] As Damascius realized, acquaintance with the holy book of late Platonism had a catalytic effect on Theosebius, equipping him with a real 'theosophy', complete with theory and practice. Thus to the powers of exorcism with which his inherited devotion to the God of the Jews had endowed him, Theosebius added the Chaldean ritual of purification by the rays of the Sun.[68] Far from replacing the knowledge he already possessed as obsolete or incompatible with his new persona, the new learning provided a conscious enrichment.

His contemporary, Marinus, appears subtly different. He rejected his ancient faith in order to adopt a more accomplished creed, but his faith followed him in his new devotion. Without realizing it, when he embraced Hellenism he left nothing behind, and he thus presents a perfect exemplum of religious acculturation. Without making any substantial sacrifice or experiencing any sense of guilt, Marinus converted to a new faith – as another more famous Samaritan by the name of Justin had done three centuries earlier. Rejecting nothing, he ascended the ladder of spiritual (and worldly) achievement until he reached its pinnacle: for Justin the pinnacle was Christianity, for Marinus, Hellenism and the chair of Plato itself.

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[67] 'He wrote a little pamphlet on the subtleties contained in the great *Republic*, praising in rational terms the theosophy which comes from the gods': *PH* fr. 46D, 12–14.

[68] See *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 194, ed. and trans. E. Des Places, *Oracles chaldaïques* (Paris, 1971), with Julian, *Or.* 8.172a, d, ed. and trans. G. Rochefort, *L'Empereur Julien: œuvres complètes*, vol. 2.1 (Paris, 1963).

While on the subject of the Samaritans, we may turn to Procopius, for whom a Samaritan identity has even been suggested by recent scholarship.[69] When Justinian called on the law to punish those who refused to convert to Chalcedonian Christianity, 'all of them who lived in my home town of Caesarea', writes Procopius, 'as well as in the other cities deemed it foolish to suffer harm on behalf of a stupid doctrine, and they simply replaced their present name with that of the Christians' (*Secret History* 11.25). Pegasius was one step ahead of them. Long before there was any question of coercion, he realized how crucially important to advancement in society were identity labels. To him, whatever his deepest beliefs, circumstances dictated the correct mode of public behaviour, using Christianity and paganism as flags of convenience for a comfortable passage through life. His case was of course one of the commonest, as was understood only too well by the powers-that-be. For before Islam was ever to muster a policy of reluctance towards interested conversions, Christian hierarchs had articulated strong objections to the strategy of forced conversion, using arguments which were as much political as theological.[70]

Among our 'converts', Synesius is the man with the eclectic identity *par excellence* and the one who bore this identity with a notable lack of any sense of inner contradiction or social *gēne*. Gradually initiated into Platonism by Hypatia, who remained the one charismatic presence in his life, he could not begin to understand why she was shocked by his decision to become a Christian prelate (as would appear from her lack of response to the letters he sent her after his acceptance of the see of Pentapolis). Since to him Christianity represented a theologically inadequate but socially useful religious construct, he saw nothing wrong in wearing its garb in order to serve the community. To him, becoming a bishop was no different from travelling to Constantinople in order to address the emperor on behalf of the provincials. Indeed it was in the same spirit of personal sacrifice for the common good that he performed both functions. Soon after assuming his ecclesiastical duties he realized how unwise he had been,

[69] See Katherine Adshead, 'Procopius and the Samaritans', in Pauline Allen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (eds), *The Sixth Century, End or Beginning?* (Brisbane, 1996), pp. 35–41.

[70] An exceptionally interesting document, dating from 632, points to some of the many theological and political problems behind the process of forced conversions. In a letter written from a monastery in the vicinity of Carthage, Maximus the Confessor informs the members of a religious community in Palestine that, on the order of Heraclius, thousands of Jews and Samaritans were summarily baptized on the day of the Pentecost (31 May 632). Commenting on the occasion, Maximus expresses his horror at the profanation of the baptismal rite and his concern for the danger faced by the souls of people who are formally Christian but deep down 'impious'; interestingly he concludes by drawing attention to the political aspect of the issue – imperfectly Christianized elements could always act as a fifth column within a Christian community, inciting apostasy and causing the perdition of others as well as themselves. For a translation and a commentary on this document, see now Gilbert Dagron, 'Introduction historique. Entre histoire et apocalypse', in Dagron and Déroche, *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin*, pp. 30–32.

but his repentance arose merely from the realization that he had unwittingly added to his existing commitments an enormous daily burden. Contrary to his expectation, 'the change in his way of life' prevented him from devoting himself to his chosen vocation – philosophy.

For each one of the cases analysed above there were thousands – millions – of examples, each presenting an infinite variety of nuance. And, more to the point, for each articulate convert there were thousands who were simply confused.

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XXI

From Polis to Theoupolis: School Syllabuses and Teaching Methods in Late Antiquity

Οὐκοῦν ὁ τέχνην οἰόμενος ἐν γράμμασι καταλιπεῖν, καὶ αὖ ὁ παραδεχόμενος ὡς τι σαφὲς καὶ βέβαιον ἐκ γραμμάτων ἐσόμενον, πολλῆς ἂν εὐηθείας γέμοι.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 275c

1. The Road to Ossification

Towards the end of the second century, the court physician Galen complained that the majority of students in philosophy and medicine were virtually illiterate; he also felt that this phenomenon, which was nothing new, had reached alarming dimensions in only a few decades[1]. Galen — it must be immediately pointed out — was no manic defender of Atticism; he was a man of genius and substance, who went against the current fashion in thinking that "it is preferable to commit barbarisms and solecisms in tongue rather than in life"[2].

A little earlier, Lucian, a man of a fundamentally different temperament, origin, intellectual fibre and social status to Galen, had also called attention to growing illiteracy, denouncing an educational system which encouraged the cultivation of self-indulgence on the part of both students and teachers: for Lucian, standards fell as the numbers of qualified rhetors and philosophers rose, and this he viewed as the direct result of State involvement in education[3].

The complaint of Galen and of Lucian raises a double question: what did such men expect their cultured contemporaries to know and — conversely — what did the educational curriculum of the day offer? In order to answer the latter part of this question, one has to go back to early Hellenistic times, when Greek education found its more or less definitive form[4], and, briefly, follow its development into the Antonine period.

The term ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία — all-round education — which was loosely applied to secondary/higher training in post-classical times[5], is indicative of the ideals of the society which produced it. It presupposes a philosophy which views Man as a whole, bodily, intellectually and spiritually. Παιδεία, and not παιδιά, — a classic pun in Greek — is the road by which the child becomes a man; it is not by way of play and amusement that one becomes an all-round personality, but by toil, discipline, exertion and even torture, which are all meanings of the word παιδεία. The ultimate end of education is the knowledge of God, as Plato postulates in a well-known passage of his *Laws*[7]. For the attainment of this goal the fostering of the analytical faculties of the mind is just as necessary as the training of the body. Yet both of these are mere stages along the road; what must follow is the awakening of the aesthetic preoccupations of the soul, so that the primordial intuition of the divine blooms into consciousness. Translated into a curriculum, this educational ideal comprised, logically enough, gymnastics, mathematics, music and linguistics and was diffused to the ruling classes of the new oikoumene through the Hellenistic socio-cultural institution *par excellence*, the gymnasium[8].

Yet theory is one thing and practice another. Plato had warned his readers that education should resem-

1. Galen (Kühn), vol. XIX, 9.

2. *Ibid.*, 61. On the Second Sophistic, which was the prevailing literary movement at that time, see below, nn. 22, 23.

3. *Bis Acc.*, 6-11, 31; *Rhet. Praec.*, passim.

4. H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l' éducation dans l' antiquité* (Paris 1965[6]), 151-152; C. Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (London 1980), 125.

5. For a discussion of the probable origins of the term, see A.P. Bos, The idea of Enkyklios Paideia, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50/2 (1989), 194-198. The best analysis is still that of H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris 1938), 211-235 as complemented by idem, *Education*, 523, n.2. For subsequent developments, see Mango, *op. cit.*, 127.

6. See, for instance, Plato, *Leg.* 656c; *Phaedr.* 276b.

7. Plato, *Leg.* 643a: διὰ γὰρ ταύτης (παιδείας) φαμὲν ἰτέον εἶναι τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ἐν τῷ νῦν λόγον μέχριπερ ἂν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀφίκηται.

8. For an overall view, see A.H.M. Jones, *The Greek City* (Oxford 1940), 220-224.

ble the work of the farmer, whose hard and patient labour extends over a period of eight months before any crops are yielded, and not the brief exertion which produces in eight days the charming but utterly ephemeral gardens of Adonis[9]. In other words, the goal of education is truth, and not a shallow know-how. To this Platonic axiom the Hellenistic curriculum paid lip-service only; in effect, it espoused the Sophistic/Isocratic world-view, which set relative rather than absolute standards. "Likely conjecture about useful things is far preferable to the exact knowledge of the useless", was Isocrates' sarcastic remark to Plato in this connection[10]. The acquisition of ἐπιστήμη is illusory and, more to the point, unnecessary; education has to be at the measure of man — a finite creature in a changing world. That point was fully grasped by the Romans who translated παιδεία by *humanitas* [11].

Between Isocrates' cynicism and Plato's idealism Aristotle had come up with a sensible compromise: education should aim neither at the useful nor the necessary, but be liberal and noble[12]. This maxim, which has the double advantage of sounding good, while saying nothing specific, proved prophetic: Hellenistic education never became vocational[13]; yet, one must also add that, as the elements which guaranteed its even superficial many-sidedness began to dwindle, it moved timidly in that direction[14].

As music, mathematics and even gymnastics tended to disappear from the curriculum, literature inevitably came to dominate it with Homer becoming, just as Plato had feared, "the educator of Greece"[15] or, rather, of the ruling classes of the oikoumene. But all that Homer had achieved, to Plato's mind, was "to compose false stories, which he told and still tells to mankind"[16]; he did not create realities, but phantoms[17], good only for enslaving Man's soul to the fear of death[18] and to all manner of ignoble desire[19]. A primarily literary education, therefore, confuses the soul and makes Man incapable of distinguishing between true and false, as the Christians were quick to point out[20]. Yet the Christians were not the first critics of Hellenistic education in this connection; by denouncing the frivolous and soul-benumbing character of the official paideia, they did in fact no more than take up the complaints of those critical Orientals who had condemned Greek education at the dawn of the Hellenistic era.

Unlike Alexander himself, the overwhelming majority of Greeks in the Hellenistic World, like the aristocrats of the *ancien régime*, were determined to forget nothing of the *polis* and to learn nothing from their new surroundings. And yet, more often than not, these people built their gymnasia in the lands of men who, being the heirs to older cultural traditions, were forcibly struck by the superficiality of the Hellenistic curriculum and did not shun giving voice to this impression. "It is not customary" for the great majority of the Egyptians, reported Diodorus, "to receive instruction in wrestling and music; for they think that from daily training in wrestling their young men will gain, not health, but a vigour which is both short-lived and dangerous, while they consider music to be not just useless but even harmful since it effeminates the souls of the listeners"[21].

Such devastating criticisms normally met with total incomprehension on the part of the Greeks. Yet some seeds of doubt must have slipped through the façade of his unchallengeable belief in the superiority of his metropolitan culture, to fertilise the collective subconscious of the Hellenistic Man. Admittedly the seeds took a long time to come to fruition, but, when they did so, the harvest was impressive. And, by the time

9. *Phaedr.* 276b.

10. *Helen* 5; G. Mathieu and E. Bremond have seen very well that this hint was aimed directly at Plato and was caused by the publication of the *Phaedrus* (Isocrate, *Discours I* [Paris 1928], 155-156).

11. Gellius XIII. 17.1. The emphasis of education is no longer on the affinity of Man with God, but on the sophistic principle that Man is the measure of all things.

12. *Pol.* 1338a. 32ff: οὐχ ὡς χρησίμην παιδευτέον (...) οὐδ' ὡς ἀναγκαίαν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐλευθέριον καὶ καλήν.

13. A. Avi-Yonah (*Hellenism and the East* [Jerusalem 1978], 233-251) sees in this circumstance the main reason for the failure of Hellenism to bring about a technological revolution, despite the achievement of Hellenistic science, which however remained wholly in the theoretical sphere.

14. See below, p. 12-13.

15. *Resp.* 606e.

16. *Resp.* 377d.

17. *Resp.* 599a.

18. *Resp.* 387ab.

19. *Resp.* 605cd.

20. For the debate, see my The Idea of Hellenism, *Philosophia* 7 (1977), 344-356.

21. Diodorus 1.81.7; cf. *Maccabees* I.1.14-15 (for Palestine); see also, A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge 1975), 123-150; A. Kuhrt, Berossus' *Babyloniaka* and Seleucid Rule in Babylonia, A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, *Hellenism in the East* (London 1987), 32-56. With the single-mindedness of the newly-illuminated M. Bernal (*Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London 1987)) overstates this thesis. Yet, despite a certain naïve way of dealing with the sources, he brings into the debate the freshness of view of the outsider.

of Origen, the attack on Greek culture had taken the form of a general assault.

2. *Educated Illiteracy*

Both the streak of vocationalism and the theme of the superiority of the East did not come to the surface before the twin attachment to form and to the past could become the major driving force of Greek education. This stage in the development of the educational ethos is mirrored in a literary movement, significantly christened by its annalist "The Second Sophistic"[22]. The men this movement produced were frontally turned towards the past, depending for all inspiration on the dead. What mattered to them was "the officiousness of the word" — ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη τῆς λέξεως[23] — form rather than content. This was indeed an ideal situation for illiteracy to thrive in. The complaint of Galen and of Lucian (neither of whom is, significantly enough, included in Philostratus' gallery of sophists) was amply echoed in the following centuries by men as different as Caracalla and Themistius[24].

Yet, whether literate or illiterate, formalism in education calls for rejection. With various degrees of vehemence, in the second century men began to decry the current system of imparting knowledge to the young. Attitudes ranged from the critical indifference of the philosopher, pagan or Christian[25], to the angry denunciation by the hermit of all knowledge as absurdity[26]. However, the most dynamic answer to the state of Greek education was given by the periphery: the so-called "decolonisation" of the native languages and cultures under the impact of Christianity is a process which began in the third century and went from strength to strength. The rise of the vernacular literatures in the Eastern Mediterranean revolutionised the data of literacy by abolishing the Greek monopoly and introducing, along the traditional criteria for aesthetic and intellectual excellence, a new set of values, organic and diverse.

But even within the field of Greek education all was not negation and reaction. A growing number of men perceived the dangers incurred by the traditional educational system and attempted to infuse some relevance into it. One may well speak of an educational *Realpolitik* whose trends become discernible in the late Antonine era. Its main directive was the orientation of the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, still called by that name[27], towards professional efficiency, while the method followed to achieve this end was, as Lucian correctly saw, a discreet but mounting state interventionism. Things were beginning to change. Yet, both the institutional and the substantial reforms in education occurred in a singularly unspectacular manner and — what is truly extraordinary — without influencing the shape of the curriculum[28]. As a result, the very same studies, which produced the anthropocentric, polis-oriented gentleman described by Philostratus, three or four centuries later engendered men who, without any guilt or regret, turned their back onto the dilapidated monuments of an irrelevant past in their home towns and went on to offer the services of their worldly culture to God and his terrestrial counterpart, the emperor[29]. How could this happen?

It is a truism that what shapes mentalities is not so much the thing taught as the manner in which it is taught. This manner is conditioned by personal, institutional and social factors. Thus in order to understand how and why the man produced by the "Hellenistic" educational system came in a period of

22. Philostratus *VS* 481.

23. Iamblichus *In Tim.* fr. 9. For the morbid attachment to Greece's classical past, see Plutarch *Mor.* 814a-c; on this aspect of the psychology of Greek intellectuals, see E.L. Bowie, Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic, *Past and Present* 46 (1970), 3-41.

24. Philostratus *VS* 622-623; Themistius 27.336c.

25. M. Aurelius I.17.22; Porphyry *VP* 13.2-5, 14.1-4 (for Plotinus); Gregory Thaumaturgus. *Pan. Or.* 1.4.-5, 107 (for Origen); Eunapius *VP* IV.1.10; V.1.2-4 (for Iamblichus).

26. Antony of Egypt (?251-356) γράμματα μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, Athanasius, *Life of St Antony* 1, *PG* 26, 841A; to the philosophers who went to visit him in the desert and who had to admit that the mind comes before education, Antony remarked that "the man whose mind is healthy does not need learning" *ibid.*, 73, *PG* 26, 945 A; and Macedonius, who was Bishop Theodoret's spiritual guide (*Hist. Rel.* XIII.18), was filled with ῥήματα χάριτος *being* παιδείας μὲν πάσης ἀμύητος ἐν ἀγροικίᾳ δὲ τεθραμμένος (*ibid.*, XIII.8).

27. Diogenes Laertius VI.103; VII.129.

28. Throughout Byzantium the curriculum remained essentially what it had been in Hellenistic times: cf. Mango, *Byzantium* (as in n. 4), 125-127; A. Marcopoulos, Ἡ ὀργάνωση τοῦ σχολείου: παράδοση καὶ ἐξέλιξη, *Acts of the First International Congress: Ἡ καθημερινή ζωὴ στὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens 1989), 327. The only additions seem to have been the study of the Psalms and of a selection of sermons and addresses by Gregory of Nazianzos: N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London 1983), 8, 23.

29. A good analysis of the ideological background behind the decline of the cities as against the rise of the capital, which epitomises the sole rule of God on earth and of the emperor on the oikoumene, is provided by G. Dagron, L'empire romain d'Orient au IVème siècle et les traditions politiques de l' hellénisme: le témoignage de Thémistios, *TM* 3 (1968), 1-242.

about four centuries to be the very antithesis of his own self, we have to study the official educational policy as reflected in legislation and in the manifestos of the educationalists, but at the same time we must fumble obscurely for the frustrations, the dissatisfactions, the wishful thinking, the timid intuitions and hopes of a society engaged so full-heartedly on change. For the pattern revealed by education in late antiquity suggests that, behind an immobile façade, the work of demolition and reconstruction was complete, rather like those "renovated" houses, whose seventeenth-century façades continue to be mirrored in the waters of the Dutch canals, while nothing whatever of their original structure remains behind their outer wall.

3. *The Byzantine Split: Παιδεία οἴκοθεν and/or θύραθεν*

Though amazingly uniform, education in the Hellenistic world was not state controlled. It depended on the liberality of city-benefactors, a spontaneously homogeneous class, which declined in inverse proportion to the centralisation of the late Roman state. One of the symbolic landmarks in that process was the creation by Marcus Aurelius in 176 of chairs of philosophy and rhetoric at Athens[30]: intervening in education, the central government instituted teaching posts in what was considered to be the cultural "capital" of the Roman world[31].

Gradually but steadily, professors found themselves within the framework of the civil service; their salaries began to be paid by the State and/or the municipality, while their rights and immunities became minutely regulated by law[32]. Soon, in the increasingly hierarchical and bureaucratic society of the fourth century, professors had their movements controlled by the emperor himself or his representatives[33] and even their social status became fixed by law[34]. More ominously, teachers had to pass a test in social conformity before assuming their functions[35]. Naturally, this was much more the case for students, whose conduct and whereabouts were carefully watched by the authorities and had sanctions imposed on them for any deviation from the norm[36].

In the course of the fourth century, vocational subjects, which somehow flourished outside the traditional curriculum[37], were either incorporated into it or became re-inforced in their own right, as a result of the needs of a constantly growing administrative machinery[38]. These subjects were Latin, law and technical expertise and, eventually, government-controlled educational establishments which produced "experts" were set up[39]. The natural culmination of this process was the foundation of the University of Constantinople in 425, which came increasingly to monopolise higher education in the capital; through several complementary constitutions, regulating the manner of teaching down to the most insignificant detail, we may follow the new logic, which both created and reflected the prevailing social ethos[40]. Moreover, so that the guardians of the Law could be more efficiently controlled, legal studies were limited to Rome, Constantinople and Berytus, which also issued a degree to those students who had successfully completed a four-year course[41].

So extensive a bureaucracy as the one which flourished in the later Roman empire fed, as was natural, on an ideal of efficiency: it was not calligraphy — the spiritual virtue *par excellence*, soon destined to become a major art in the hands of the Muslims — but short-hand and accountancy that were needed. Accordingly, the ranks of the civil service were filled by "men trained to write swiftly and to read

30. Dio Cassius LXXII.31.3; Lucian *Eun.* 3; Philostratus *VS* 566.

31. See the *Panathenaic* oration by Aelius Aristides.

32. Justinian *Dig.* 50.9.4.2. (Ulpian); C. Just. 10.47.1; C.Th. 13.3.1. (AD 321); 13. 3.3. (AD 333); 13.3.11 (AD 376), on which see the detailed comment by S.F. Bonner, The Edict of Gratian on the Remuneration of Teachers, *AJP* 86 (1965), 113-137; C.Th. 11.16.15 (AD 382); 11.16.18 (AD 390); 13.3.16 (AD 414); 13.3.17 (AD 414); 13.3.18 (AD 427); C. Just. 1.5.18.4. (AD 531); 1.27.1.42 (AD 534).

33. Libanius 1.25, 82-83, 106; Himerius 46.1; Eunapius *VP* X.3.15; etc, and most importantly C.Th. 13.3.7 (AD 369).

34. C.Th. 6.21 (AD 425); see also n. 32.

35. C.Th. 13.3.5 (AD 362); 13.3.6 (AD 364); 6.21 (AD 425); C. Just. 1.5.18.4 (AD 531); 1.11.10.

36. C.Th. 14.9.1 (AD 370); on the collaboration of Church and State in this respect, see Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Severi, PO* 2, 57-70 for Berytus, and esp. 66, 69.

37. Already in the third century it was common for students to desert the study of rhetoric for law, cf. Gregory Thaum. *Pan. Or.* 56-64; 77-78; see also Libanius 48.22 (Law and Latin) and Eunapius *VP* VI.10.4.

38. "Utrum quandoque nobis sint *necessarii* iudicemus" (C. Th. 14.9.1).

39. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602* (Oxford 1964), 989-991.

40. C.Th. 14.9.3 (= C. Just. 11.19.1); 15.1.53; 6.21.

41. Dig. Const. Omnem §7 and H.J. Scheltema, *L'enseignement de droit des antécesseurs* (1970), 8-9; C. Just. 2.7.11 §2 (AD 460); 22 §4 (AD 505), repeated *verbatim* in 24 §4 (AD 517). Law was already a popular subject in Rome in the first half of the second century: Aulus Gellius XIII. 13.1.

at speed"[42]. Indeed, apart from a short interval caused by the Emperor Julian's intellectual snobbery[43], the barbarians of literacy punctuated the administration of both Church and State for many centuries to come[44].

The stenographers, however, were mere tools in the hands of higher officials, men who, as Constantius wrote to his Caesar, had to be "so polished in the use of letters that words proceeded from [them] without the offence of imperfections"[45]. In other words, the ideal administrator was the direct descendant of the sophist, whether of the classical or the imperial period. He was the man for whom the years spent on "the Classics" were an exercise in style and logic, a training in elegance in speech and mind. As a third-century school-master put it, the achievement of education consisted in making one able "to magnify small things and belittle what is great, talk in an old-fashioned way about the new and in a novel manner about the old"[46].

An education which so unashamedly proclaimed itself to be just a technique could be taught in a purely technical way, and this is what happened increasingly from the fourth century onwards. As should be clear, however, this was the end of a long process, for no external force, either legislative or ideological, could have sufficed to produce this result, if the seed of evolution were not already there. Since early Hellenistic times, as the peoples whom the Greeks conquered on the military level saw, the education of the gymnasium was in effect a technique, which prepared man for a more confortable life on earth; its aestheticism was the horror of manual work and not a stage on the way to God. Such a culture could very well be viewed in a quantitative manner, and this is what happened in the apparently brutal world of late antiquity: increasingly, the student acquired his grammar and logic through *florilegia*. Rather like our modern 'source books' in historical studies, the Byzantine anthologies alleviated the task of both teacher and student; and at the same time they served as instruments of ideological propaganda.

In a paradoxical way, however, late antique moralists agreed with Plato on the issue of education: both condemned poetry as immoral, and felt that the primary purpose of education was the shaping of the soul. Where they differed was in the policy they pursued; most late antique educationalists were less radical than Plato, advocating a policy of moral purgation, by curtailing or interpreting, rather than one of total rejection of dubious authors[47]. Yet for what they retained as morally sound, they had recourse to a purely Platonic device: they relegated it to the wisdom of the East — Jewish, Persian or Egyptian — from which the Greeks were shown to have amply drawn[48].

Disinfected through abridgement and interpretation, Greek paideia became a code culture and by the same token the phenomenon of "educated illiteracy" (so well-known to us from the contemporary West) became widely spread[49]. The reduction in the numbers of the 'educated' which ensued may therefore have more to do with the indifference and contempt that men felt towards an educational system so totally divorced from life and from common sense than with the decline in economic standards[50].

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42. Agathias IV.1.2; cf. Libanius 31.28, 33.

43. *I.a.* see Libanius 18.131.

44. See Marrou, *Education* (as in n. 4), 414-415; for references, see P. Lemerle, *Ὁ πρῶτος βυζαντινὸς Οὐμανισμός*, trans. M. Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou (Athens 1981), n. 15, 316-317 and n. 93, 346.

45. C.Th. 14.1.1. (AD 360).

46. Longinus ap. Spengel, *Rhetores* I, 216.

47. See my *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (London 1992²), 10, 18-19. One should add Julian himself to the Christian moralists; like them, he both condemned certain categories of thinkers on the grounds of indecency and distorted the message of others through his personal interpretation: cf. *ep.* 89b, 300c-301d.

48. As C. Mango notes, "this downgrading of all things Greek had, of course, a long history behind it, and can be traced through Theodoret to the Jewish apologists (...). What interests us here is that it was retained and given considerable prominence in the chronicles", Discontinuity with the Classical Past in Byzantium, *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (University of Birmingham 1981) (= Variorum [1984], 54). It must be emphasised that this process was practised just as much by the Christians as by the pagans.

49. It has been reckoned that Basil of Caesarea and even Theodoret were acquainted with Greek culture only through *florilegia* (Lemerle, *op. cit.*, 47-48). The Emperor Julian, who knew his classics and was also well-read in contemporary literature owed his training to a unique combination of fortuitous circumstances with his exceptionally curious mind (see my *Julian and Hellenism*, 13-51) and that was one of the reasons for which he was so admired in Byzantium (*ibid.*, 231). A historian like Agathias in the sixth century, on the other hand, remained semi-educated as a result of the training that he received, see Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford 1970), 112-123 (a balanced analysis). For the contamination even of the philosophical curriculum by a condensed form of learning, see the apposite remarks of I. Hadot, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius* (Paris 1978), 163, 190.

50. As suggested by N. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (as in n. 28), 1. For the decline in literacy in late antiquity, see W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass. 1989), 285-322.

Another significant (and fatal) development consisted in the weakening of the bond between teacher and pupil, which had constituted the hallmark of education in Archaic and Classical Greece. The increasingly industrialised ethos of official education was incompatible with the notion of paideutic love which, fleeing the crowded classes of the future bureaucrats, took refuge in the philosopher's relationship with his pupils, in the desert and, occasionally, in the monastery. Indeed it was this trickling away of ἔρως from public education which dealt it its coup de grâce. Henceforth, true education — which must be distinguished from the learning of the clerk in Church and State — became a wholly private affair and, as such, was dispensed οἴκοθεν[51]. This parallel education, which often advocated the rejection of traditional culture, had much to do with the Platonic definition of paideia, in manner as well as in essence, for it was soundly based on the superiority of the spoken over the written word[52].

Throughout late antiquity there was only one attempt to bring together the two currents in education — the technical and the spiritual. This attempt was made by the most genuine of Plato's pupils, the Christian Origen. In the school he set up in Caesarea Maritima, students were allowed, and even encouraged, to study all manner of wisdom, whether Greek or foreign[53], political or religious, human or divine[54]. Besides, geometry and astronomy were considered as "the sacred subjects" *par excellence* and as such were allotted a place of honour in the curriculum[55], while all knowledge was seen as a preparation of the mind for the understanding of theology[56]. Even more significantly, the imparting of knowledge rested on a powerful bond of love between teacher and pupil, strongly reminiscent of Plato's notion of paideutic eros: "the thing I loved and craved for was philosophy and its dispenser, that divine man", are Gregory's words about his master[57].

It was a sublime but almost superhuman task that Origen set for himself and his pupils. After him, the two branches of education, the intellectual and the spiritual — the technical and the religious — continued to flow their separate ways; but, to the extent that the intellectual tributary lost its vigour and dried up, the spiritual arm became richer. The decisive turning point for this development came in the fourth century[58], though it was not until the sixth that what was happening became fully discernible. An event of the highest symbolic significance in this respect is to be seen in the renaming of Antioch under Justinian. After the terrible earthquake of 528, Malalas tells us, the proverbially licentious city "was renamed Theoupolis by order of the emperor. Besides, a written oracle was discovered at Antioch with this message: 'and you, unhappy city, shall not be called the City of Antiochus' "[59], but, as those who found or invented the oracle decided, the City of God.

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51. John Chrysostom, *On vanity* (ed. and trans. A.-M. Malingrey), 52: the young man should have his ears blocked against the immorality of the curriculum, οἴκοθεν παρεχόμενος τὰ παραδείγματα. On the dichotomy between ἐγκύκλιος or κοσμικὴ παιδεία and spiritual education, see *V. Sev.* (as in n. 36), 16 and Sophonius Hierosolymitanus, *Mir. Cyr. et Jo.* no. 70.9.

52. For the superiority of oral over learned cultures, see the classical discussion in Plato, *Phaedr.* 275a-276a.

53. Gregory Thaum. *Pan. Or.* 152-153.

54. *Ibid.*, 182: ἐξῆν δὲ μανθάνειν πάντα λόγον, καὶ βάρβαρον καὶ Ἕλληνα, καὶ μυστικώτερον καὶ πολιτικώτερον, καὶ θεῖον καὶ ἀνθρώπινον.

55. *Ibid.*, 113-114 and Origen, *Letter to Gregory* 1, *PG* 11, 88A.

56. Gregory Thaum., *op.cit.*, 122-149: the purpose of education is to bring man to God and not to make of him merely a worthy citizen, as is the case in all humanistic-minded societies.

57. *Ibid.*, 84: ἓν δέ μοι φίλον ἦν καὶ ἀγαπώμενον, φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ὁ ταύτης καθηγεμών, οὗτος ὁ θεῖος ἄνθρωπος.

58. The sudden drop in the curve of literary papyri in Egypt in the fourth century (for which see R.A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (Michigan 1965²) is not unconnected with the invasion of education by *florilegia*, its other cause, of course, being the rise of Coptic culture.

59. Malalas (Bonn), 443.16ff.; cf. Leontius Byzantinus, *Contra Nestorianos PG* 86, 1364D: τῆς πάλαι μὲν Ἀντιόχου, νῦν δὲ Θεοῦ πόλεως καλουμένης.

INDEX

Achaemenids: III 189
Achilles: III 200, 201; IX 74; XV 1–2
Adad or Twice Beyond (see also Bel): IV 25; V 122; XIII 153–4, 174; XVII 198–9, 201–3
Adonis: IV 23; XIII 173–4; XXI 10
Aedesia: XVIII 6
Aedesius, philosopher: V 122, 133; VII 278, 279; X 62; XVI 15–16, 24; XVII 204–5
Aegyptus: XIX 353
Aelius Granianus Macer: XI 272
Aeneas of Gaza: XIII 179; XIX 352
Agapius, iatrophilosopher: XVIII 19
Agapius of Hierapolis: V 132
Agathias: XVIII 25; XXI 13
Agathos Daimon: XV 3
Aglaophamus: VI 138
Agrippa, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 22–3
Aion: III 202–4; X 52; XVIII 12
αἵρεσις / heresy: VII 272–3; XX 25–6
Al-Kindi: XVIII 29
Al-Ma'mun: XVIII 27
Al-Mas'udi: XVIII 28–9
Alexander of Abonoteichos: X 46–7, 49–50, 52, 62; XII 115; XVI 14; XX 27
Alexander, Tiberius Julius: XX 28–9
Alexander Severus, emperor: IV 24
Alexander the Great: I 16; III 190; XXI 10
Alexandria: XVIII 1, 5, 9, 12–22
Alexandria, library of: V 128
Alypius: II 246
Amelius: II 245; IV 17, 24; V131; VI 131; XI 275; XIII 153, 156; XV 3; XVII 203
Ammon, oracle of: X 54; XIII 180
Ammonius of Alexandria, philosopher: XVIII 12, 22; XIX 353
Ammonius, grammarian, pagan activist: XVIII 15
Ammonius Saccas: VI 133; VII 273, 280; XVIII 4; XX 31–2, 44
Anastasius Sinaïta: XVII 207
Anatolius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 19
Anatolius of Laodicia: II 244, 246
Angels / angelology: IV 20–21; X 53–4; XII 118, 119; XIII 180; XIV 249–50
Anthemius: XVIII 18
Antoninus: X 60, 61; XVI 14–15; XVIII 13–16
Antonius of Alexandria: XVIII 9
Antony St: XXI 11
Apa Moses: XII 126
Apamea: II, 245, 249; V *passim.*
Apollo: III 194; IV 20–21; V 126; X 45–57; XI *passim*; XII 115, 125, 126–7, 128; XVII 195; XVIII 9
Apollonius of Tyana: III 199; X 50, 58; XV 4; XVI 14, 16; XVII 203, 207
Apuleius: IV 20, 21–2, 23; XVII 203, 206–7; XX 42
apathanatismos: IX 74
Aramaic: III 189
Archiadas: XVIII 9
Arete, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 18–19
Arethas: XIV 237
Argarizos Mt: XX 35
Arimanius: VIII 365, 368
Aristagora: XII 127
Aristides, Aelius: I 24; III 204; XII 115
Aristippus: XX 25
Aristotle: II 248; VI 134–5, 140; VII 280; IX 67; XIV 248; XVIII 3, 29; XX 36; XXI 10
Arnouphis: XVII 203, 206
Artemidorus of Daldis: XII 115
Asclepiades: XV 5; XVIII 20
Asclepigeneia: IV 27; XIII 162

Asclepiodotus of Alexandria: VI 138; VII 282–3, 286; XII 125, 127; XIII 181; XVIII 2, 6, 9–10, 11, 23
Asclepiodotus of Aphrodisias: VII 283; XVIII 11
Asclepius: III 195; IV 30; VIII 364; X 46, 52; XII 115, 127
Asphalius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 18
Athanasius: VII 281
Athanasius II, Bishop of Alexandria: XVIII 22
Athene: III 201; XIII 162
Athens, Platonic Academy of: XVIII 1, 2, 4–7, 10–12, 22–4, XX 33–8
Attis: I 8; III 199; IV 23; VIII 364; IX 68; XIII 173–4; XVIII 9
Augustine: xi; I 23; IX 72; XX 28, 38
Aurelian, emperor: VIII 364; XII 125; XIX 351
Aurelius Belius Philippus: V 123; XVII 199
Averroes: XIV 248–9

Babylas: XI 274
Basil of Caesarea: XXI 13
Bel: III 197–8; V 122–3; XIII 153–6; XVII 198–200
Bel, Temple of at Apamea: IV 25; V 123, 125, 129–33; VI 130; VII 274, 276; XIII 153–6; XVII 201
Bel-Marduk: V 122; XVII 197–8
Berossus: III 191–3
Bes: XII 126–7, 128
Boethius: XIII 157
Bowersock, G.W.: I 7, 8, 11, 12; XIII 181
Brahmans: III 191; V 124; VII 274
Braudel, Fernand: I 2, 3, 16
Brown, Peter: ix, xi; I 4–10, 19, 22

Calcidius: VII 274
Cameron, Averil: x, xi; I 11, 13, 15
Canachos: XI 272
canon: xii; V 133–4; VI *passim*; XIII 180, 181
Caracalla: X 56–7; XXI 11
Carrhae, see Harran
Carrié, J.-M.: I 14
Cautes: VIII 361, 365
Cautopates: VIII 361, 365
Celsus: IV 22; XX 28
Chaldaean Oracles: xv, xvi; III 192, 197–8; IV 24–6; V *passim*; VI 129–30, 139–41; VII 274, 276; VIII 364–6; IX 65, 68, 70, 74, 75, 76; X 48–9, 51; XII 115–6; XIII *passim*; XIV *passim*; XV 3; XVII *passim*; XVIII 4; XIX 353, 355; XX 40
Chaldaeans: III 195; V 123, 125, 126; VI 130; XII 121; XIII 154–5, 161
Charlemagne: I 8
Chosroes I: V 132; XIII 170–71; XVIII 25–6
Christ: VIII 364, 366; X 51; XII 118, 126; XIII 179; XVII 207
Christianity / Christians: x–xi; xiv, xvi, xvii; III 193, 197–9, 202, 204–5; IV 15, 23, 24; V 119–20; VII 272–3, 278; IX 69; X 51, 55, 60; XI 272, 273, 274; XII 130; XIII 179; XIV 247–8; XIX 351; XX *passim*; XXI 10
Chrysanthius, philosopher: VII 278, XVI 24; XVIII 6
Chrysippus: VI 140
Cicero: IX 64
Claros, oracle of Apollo at: III 194; IV 20; V 120; XI 271; XII 115, 124; XIII 178–80
Claudian: XVII 206
Clement of Alexandria: IV 15
Codex: V 117, 127, 129
Combès, Joseph: XIII 158
Constantine, emperor: I 16; XI 275, 276; XIX 354, 356; XX 32
Constantius II: VIII 361; XII 126; XXI 13
Constantius, Julius: XI 276
Corbin, Henry: IV 19, 24, 30; XIV 249–50
Cornelius Labeo, see Labeo
Cosmas Indicopleustes: I 19
Cumont F.: VIII *passim*
Cybele: I 8; III 194, 195, 199; IV 19, 30; IX 68, 69; XVIII 9
Cynegius: V 132–3, XIII 156; XVIII 14; XIX 355
Cynics: VII 280, 284; X 48; XX 25
Cyril of Alexandria: VII 281; XII 125–6; XVIII 15, 16; XX 32–3, 35
Cyrus and John, saints: XII 125–6; XVIII 15

Damascius: I 23; II 247, 248, 249; IV 28; V 121; VI 137; VII 271, 281–91; XII 123, 129; XIII 153, 157–77, 181;

XIV 237; XVI 14–15; XVII 203; XVIII *passim*; XIX 354, 355, 357; XX 33–9, 45
Damasus, pope: IV 23; XX 42
Decius, edict of: xvi; I 25; XX 24, 29–30
Delphi, oracle of: XI *passim*; XII 115, 124
Democritus: III 190
Demonax: XVI 14; XX 27
Des Places, Edouard: XIII 158, 164; XIV 239
Dexippus, correspondent of Iamblichus: II 249; XVI 21
διατριβή: XX 25
Didyma, oracle of Apollo at: V 120; XI *passim*; XII 115, 124; XIII 180
Didymus: XIII 157
Dio Chrysostom: XX 39
Diocletian: X 57
Diodorus Siculus: XVII 198; XXI 10
Diogenes the Cynic: XX 25
Dione: V 133
Dionysos: III 201–3; IV 23 VIII 367; IX 67–8; XIII 173–4
Dioscuri: VIII 369–70
Dodds, E.R: I 6, 10; II 248; V 124–5; XII 115–16, 123; XIII 164, 180; XVII 199
Domitian, emperor: XVII 207
Domninus: VI 138; VII 286–7; XVIII 11
Dorus: VII 287; XVIII 9
Douglas, Mary: I 5
Dyscolius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 20, 22–3

ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία: XXI 9, 11
Egyptians: III 191–3; V 124; VII 274; XII 121
Elagabalus: V 130; XIII 155; XVII 202
Elissaeus: XIV 248–50
Emre, Ismail: V 126–7; XIII 151–2
Entrechius: XVIII 20
Epictetus: VI 135; XX 26–8, 31, 34, 45
Epicurus / Epicureanism: V 128, 134; VI 140; VII 280; VIII 363; X 48, 49; XX 25
Epiphanius: XVIII 12
Eubulus: VIII 367
Eudocia-Athenais, empress: XVIII 7
Eunapius: II 244, 245, 246; VI 132; XII 123; XV 4; XVI 14, 23, 24–5, 26; XVIII 3; XIX 350, 355
Euprepius: XVIII 12
Eusebius of Caesarea: I 2, 19; VII 274–5; XI 274, 278; XII 116, 117–18, 122, 125, 127–30
Eusebius of Myndus: IV 29; VII 278–9
Eustathius, philosopher: X 59; XVI 23
Evagrius Scholasticus: V 132
Evhemerus: IX 64, 68

Felicianus, Flavius: XI 276–7
Festugière, A.J.: I 10
Festus: X 61; XI 273
Ficino, Marsilio: II 246, 247; XII 117
florilegia: XXI 13–14

Galen: XX 26; XXI 9, 11
Galileans: III 197; IV 23
Gennadios Scolarios: XIV 248–9
George of Cappadocia: XVIII 13, 16
George of Trebizond: XIV 247
Gessius, brother of Eudocia: XVIII 7
Gessius, doctor at Alexandria: XVIII 20; XIX 353
Giardina, Andrea: I 8, 9–12, 14
Gibbon, Edward: I 3–4, 17, XVI 26
Glycon: X 46–7, 49
Gnosticism, Gnostics: III 196, 201; V 134; XIII 167
godfearers: XX 33–5
gods, ethnic or national: III 197; IV 19, 23
golden chain: VII 280; IX 75–6
Gordon R.L.: VIII *passim*
Grabar, Oleg: I 7
Gregory of Nazianzos: XXI 11

Hadad: see Adad
Hadot, Pierre: I 6
Hadrian, emperor: IV 24
Hägg, Tomas: I 5
Harpocras: XII 126
Harran: XVIII 1, 24–9
Harun-al-Rashid: I 8; XVIII 27
Hecataeus: III 191
Hecate: IV 22, 26–7, 29; V 121, 133; X 59; XII 123; XIII 174; XIV 246
Hector: XV 1
Hegias: VII 283, 285; XVIII 9, 22, 23
Helen, augusta: V 132
Helios-Mithra: IV 23, VIII *passim*; X 52; XX 34
Helladius: XVIII 15

Hellenism: ix–xvii; II 249; III *passim*; V 117; XI 274; XIII 181; XX 31, 35
ἑλληνισταί: III 190
Heracles: IX 67, 68–9; XV 5
Heraclitus: IX 65; XVII 203
Heraclius the Cynic: IX 66–70
Heraiscus: XII 123; XV 5; XVIII 11, 20
Hermes: III 201; V 126; IX 76; XVII 195
Hermes Aerius: XVII 206
Hermes Trismegistus (Thoth): II 246; III 192–3; V 118, 126; XVIII 15
Hermetica / Hermeticism: II 246, 248; III 192, 193; IV 16, 23; V 125; VI 132; VII 276; IX 65; X 47, 54; XVII 201; XVIII 14, 15–6, 27, 29; XX 29, 30
Hermias: XIII 157; XVIII 6
Herodotus: III 191
Hesiod: IX 63, 72, 73, 76
Hesychius of Miletus: XVII 196, 198
Hierocles: XIII 157; XVIII 3, 18–19, 20; XX 34
Hieron: XI 274
Hilarius of Antioch: VII 284
Himerius, rhetor: VIII 362;
Himerius, son of Sopater: XVI 22
Holy Cross, martyrion of: V 132–3
Homer: IX 63, 65; 70–76; XXI 10
Horapollo: XIII 179; XV 5; XVIII 6, 12, 20, 21–2; XIX 352–7; XX 33
Hostilianus Hesychius: VI 131, XVII 203
House C, on the Areopagus: XVIII 23
Hypatia: I 8; XVI 14; XVIII 11, 16; XX 40, 46
Hypsistos, Theos / Zeus: XX 34, 35

Iacobus Psychristus: XVIII 12
Iamblichus: xiv–xv; I 8, 21; II *passim*; III 191, 192, 197, 200; IV 25, 27–9; V 121–2, 126, 128–9, 131–3, 135; VI *passim*; VII 273, 275–91; VIII 363–71; IX 65–76; X 48, 58–9; XI 275; XII *passim*: XIII 149, 153, 156, 164, 167; XIV 251; XVI 14, 15, 16–27; XVII 200, 202, 203 204–5; XVIII 3–4, 5, 10, 11, 29; XX 36; XXI 11
'Iamblichus' school': III 202; VI 131–3
Iamblichus, the novelist: XVII 197
Iaô: IV 21; X 52–3
Illus: XVIII 19
Ionopolis-Ineboli: X 46
intolerance, religious: XVIII *passim*
Isidore: II 247; VI 137–8; VII 271, 282–91; XIII 175; XVIII 2, 5, 6, 7–8, 11, 17, 20–23; XX 36–8
Isis: III 193–4, 195; IV 19, 20, 21–2, 23, 26, 30; XII 122, 125–7, 128; XVIII 7, 15
Islam: xiv, xvii; III 205; IV 30; XII 130; XIII 181; XIV 247–8; XX 46
Isocrates: xiii; XXI 10
iynx / iynges: XIII 172–3

Jehovah: III 197; IV 23; X 53; XX 34
Jesus: VI 139; IX 69; XIV 248
Jews / Judaism: xiii; III 191, 194; IV 15, 23, 24; V 119, 124; VII 272, 274; X 58; XI 272; XIV 249; XX 23, 35, 46
John Philoponus: XII 129
Josephus: III 191–2
Julia Domna: III 199; XV 4
Julian, correspondent of Iamblichus: II 249; VII 277; XVI 21–2; XVII 205
Julian, emperor: xiv–xv; I 21, II 244, 245; III 197, 198; IV 22–3, 24, 29; V 122, 128–9, 134–5; VI 140–41; VII 273, 277–80; IX *passim*; X 49, 56, 57, 60; XI 274, 277; XII 116, 122, 123, 124, 128; XIII 149, 156, 157, 162, 163; XV 1, 4–5; XVI 14, 19, 23, 25–7; XVII 203, 208; XVIII 4, 8, 13, 17, 24, 25; XIX 351; XX 32–3, 38, 41–2, 44–5; XXI 13
Julian the Chaldaean: IV 25; V 121–7; VI 130; VII 274; XIII 149–55; XVII *passim*
Julian the Theurgist: III 198; IV 25; V 121–7, 133–4; VI 130, 139, 140; VII 274, 279; XIII 149–55, 162; XV 3; XVII *passim*
Justin Martyr: I 23; II 245; IV 15; XX 26, 35, 45
Justinian: I 8; VII 280; XVIII 18, 24–6; XX 30, 46

Kaldellis, Anthony: xi
Kabasilas, Nicholas: XIV 249
Khusrau Anushirwan, see Chosroes I
koine: xii, xiii; III *passim*; IV 24; V 129; XIII 152, 177–82

Koran: xv; V 118, 125, 127–8, 134–6; XIII 149, 152
Kroll Wilhelm: XIII 157–8, 164; XIV 238–9, XVII 196
Kronos: XIII 169, 174
Kunstwollen: I 10
Kydones, Demetrius: XIV 249

Labeo, Cornelius: V 120; X 51, 55; XIII 178–9
Lactantius: IX 64; X 50, 53
Lane Fox, Robin: I 7
Late antiquity: ix–xii
Leonticus: XI 274
Leontuchos: III 195, IV 30
Leontius, emperor: XVIII 19
Leontius, Flavius: XI 276
Lewy, Hans: XIII 155, 158, 164, 180; XVII 193, 195, 197
Libanius: XV 3, 4–5; XX 41
Licinius, emperor: II 249; VII 277
Liebeschuetz, Wolf: I 11–3, 17, 26
logos (god): III 193, 196; IV 23; V 118, 120; VIII 364, 365, 366; IX 76
Longinus: XXI 13
Lot, Ferdinand: I 18
Lucian: III 200–201, 203; X 47; XII 115; XV 4; XVI 14; XX 25, 27–8; XXI 9, 11
Lydus, John: V 127; XIII 152, 157, 182

Macedonius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 17–8, 23–4
Macedonius, hermit XXI 11
Macrinus: V 130; XI 272
Macrobius: IV 22, 23
Magi: III 191; V 124; VI 136; VII 274; VIII 363, 365, 367–8; XIV 248
Magical papyri: IV 17, 24, 26–7; V 125; XII 120, 122, 127; XIII 181
Magna Mater: see Cybele
Majercik, Ruth: XIII 158, 164; XIV 239
Malchus, see Porphyry
Mandulis: X 52
Manetho: III 191–3
Mani: V 134; VI 139
Marcellinus: XVIII 18
Marcellus, Bishop: V 132–3; XIII 156
Marcus Aurelius: XVII 205–6; XXI 12
Marinus: IV 30; V 128; VI 130, 137–8; VII 281–3, 287; XVI 23; XVIII 4, 11–12, 22; XX 35–7, 45
Marnas: III 195; IV 30; XVIII 7
Marrou, Henri-Irénée: xi
Marwan II: XVIII 27
Maximus the Confessor: XX 46
Maximus of Ephesos: IV 29; VII 278–9; X 60–61; XII 116, 123, 128; XVI 15, 26; XX 32
Mazzarino, Santo: I 6, 10, 14
μετάνοια: XX 28
Mishnah: V 118; VI 129
Mithra / Mithraism: III 194; IV 19, 23; VIII *passim*; IX 65; XVIII 12
Mithraeum in Constantinople: VIII 361–2
Moderatus: VII 274
Monotheism: xii, xvi; IV *passim*; XIII *passim*
Montesquieu: I 3
Moses: V 118; VI 129; IX 65
Muhammad: V 134; VI 139; XIII 151; XIV 248; XVII 196
Musonius Rufus: XX 26

Neapolis (Nablus): XX 35–6
Nemesius: VII 274
Nestorius: IV 27; V 122; XIII 162; XV 2; XVII 208; XVIII 6; XIX 355
New Testament canon (see also canon): V 118–20; VI 129
Nicomedes: XVIII 19
Nicomachus of Gerasa: II 246, 248; IX 76; XIII 151
Nigrinus: XX 27
Nock, A.D.: I 23; XIII 178
Nonnos of Aphrodisias: XII 126
Numa: V 136
Numenius: II 245; III 190–91; IV 24; V 123–6, 131; VI 129, 138; VII 273–5; IX 65; X 48–9; XIII 153–5, 168; XVII 199–201; XX 43

Odysseus: III 202; XV 2
Oenomaus of Gadara: X 47; XII 115
Olympiodorus, philosopher: XIII 157; XVI 23; XVIII 6
Olympiodorus of Thebes: XVIII 18; XIX 350–51, 355

Olympius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 19
Olympius, Alexandrian holy man: XVIII 10, 14, 15–16
Oribasius: XI 277
Orientalism: III 190, 192, 197
Origen: VII 274–5; XII 121; XVIII 4, 14; XXI 11, 14.
Oromasdes: VIII 365, 368
Orpheus / Orphica: V 126; VI 138–9; VII 283, 286; VIII 367; IX 67, 70, 76; XIII 177–8; XIV 251; XVII 201
Osiris: XVIII 12
osmosis: xv, xvii; III 199; IV 17, 18
overachievers: I 7

paideia: xiii, xvii; V 129; XXI 9
Pamprepius: XVIII 19
Pan: IX 67
Parmenides: VI 136; IX 65; XIII 178
Parmenides: VI 136, 137–8
Patroclus: IX 74
Paul, apostle: V 136; XX 28, 30, 42
Pegasius, Bishop: XV 1; XX 41–2, 46
Peregrinus: I 23; XV 4; XVI 14; XX 26, 27
Perseus: X 46
Peter Mongus: XII 126; XVIII 20, 21, 22
Petilius: V 136
Philebus: VI 136, 137
Philip the Arab: III 202–3
Philo of Alexandria: XX 28
Philostratus: X 58; XV 4; XVI 13; XXI 11
Piganiol, André: I 10, 15
Pirenne, Henri: I 10
Poimandres: XX 27
Placidus Furius: XI 276
Plato: xvi; II 245, 247, 248; III 190; IV 15–16; V 118, 120, 124, 126; VI 129, 132, 135–6, 140, 141; VII 273–4, 281–91; VIII 364; IX 63–4, 65, 70–76; XII 116; XIII 150–51, 156, 160–61, 167; XIV 247, 248, 249, 250; XV 3, 5; XVII 195; XVIII 3, 4–5; XX 25, 34–5, 45; XXI 9–10, 13–14
platoneia: XV 3
Platonic canon: VI 135–8, 139
Platonici: II 244–5; VI 129; VII 281; XV 5; XVIII 26
Platonici (of Persia): XIV 250
Pletho, George Gemistos: xiii; XIII 164; XIV *passim*
Plotinus: I 8, 23, 24; II 244–5, 248; III 196; IV 17, 19–20; VI 129, 131, 133–4; VII 273–4, 275–6; IX 65; X 55; XI 275; XII 116, 118, 119, 121, 122, 129; XIII 153, 156, 168; XV 3–4; XVI 14, 15; XVII 200; XVIII 4, 6, 10; XX 31–2, 44; XXI 11
Plutarch of Athens: IV 25, 27; VII 280, 281, 284; XIII 162; XVIII 6, 10
Plutarch of Chaeronea: II 249; V 136; X 45–6, 48, 49, 55; XI 271, 275; XII 115
Poimenius, correspondent of Iamblichus: XVI 23–4.
Porphyry: II 244–5; 247, 248; III 191, 200, 203; IV 17, 25, 28, 29; V 120, 127, 131; VI 130, 131, 133; VII 274–5; IX 66; X 50–51, 55; XI 275; XII 117–22, 129; XIII 152, 153, 178–9; XVII 194, 201, 207; XVIII 8, 29; XIX 353
Posidonius: XIII 154–5
Priscianus: XIII 171; XVIII 26
Priscus: VII 278, XVI 15
Proclus: xv; II 247, 248; III 195; IV 25, 27, 29–30; V 122, 125, 128, 129; VI 138; VII 281–91; VIII 363; IX *passim*; XII 116–17, 123, 128, 129; XIII 149–51, 153–4, 157–77, 181; XIV 237–9, 241–2, 245–6; XVI 23; XVII 195–6, 198, 205, 206, 208; XVIII 1, 4, 6, 7–11, 17, 18, 22; XX 35–7
Procopius of Caesarea: V 132; XX 46
Procopius of Gaza: XIV 237; XIX 352, 356
Prodicus: IX 67
Prohaeresius: X 60
Prometheus: III 201–5
proselytism: VII 272
  and Julian: IX 71
Psellus, Michael: xiii; V 126; VII 288, 289; XIII 149–52, 158, 164, 171; XIV *passim*; XV 3; XVII 194–6, 206, 207
pyramid, cosmic: III 195–7, 205; IV 18–19; 20, 23, 24; VII 271; IX 69; XIII 181
Pyrrhon / pyrrhonism: V 128, 134; VI 140

Pythagoras / pythagoreanism: II 245, 246, 248; III 190, 199–200; IV 28; V 120, 124; VI 132, 134, 136, 138, 139, 140; VII 273–4, 282, 286; VIII 367; IX 64–5, 70; X 47–50, 58; XIV 248; XV 2, 3; XVI 16, 27; XX 25, 29

Rabbula: VI 131
Rhea: XIII 169, 174–5
Riegl, Alois: I 10
Rostovtzeff, M.I.: I 6, 10, 15
Rousseau, Philip: I 6

Sabazius: XIII 173–4
Sabians: XVIII 27, 29
Saffrey, H.D.: XIII 156, 158; XVII 195–6
Sallustius Secundus, see Salutius
Salustius the Cynic: VII 284–5
Salutius Secundus: XII 122; XVI 27
Samaritans / Samaritanism: XX 23, 35–7, 45–6
Sarapio: VII 283, 285; XVI 14–15; XVIII 6, 9
Sarapis: XII 126
Sceptics / Scepticism: VII 280, VIII 363
Semele: IX 69; XIV 242
Septimius Severus: V 130
Seridos, Abba: X 62
Severianus: XVIII 17, 18
Severus, philosopher: XVIII 18
Sextus Empiricus: IX 64
Sextus Varius Marcellus: V 130–31; XIII 155
Sibylline Oracles: V 118, 125; XIX 353–4
Simplicius: II 247, 248; VI 134; VII 286, 289, 290; XIII 157, 162, 164, 181; XVIII 26
Siniossoglou, Niketas: xi
Socrates: VI 136, 137; IX 64,71, 73–4; XV 3; XX 25, 31
Sohrawardi: XIV 249–50
Sol Invictus: VIII 364; X 56
Solon: III 190
Sopater: II 249; III 202; XVI 20–25; XVII 205
Sopater the Younger: XVI 22
Sophists: IX 63–4
Sophronius of Jerusalem: XII 126
Sosipatra: X 59–60; XVIII 13
Sozomen: XVII 207–8
Spengler, Oswald: I 3
Stein, Ernest: I 24
Stobaeus, John: XVI 16–25
Stoics / Stoicism: VI 134; IX 64; X 48; XX 25, 34
Symmachus, Aurelius: XX 43
Synesius of Cyrene: XII 129–30; XIII 157; XX 39–41, 46–7
Syrianus: II 247, 248; IV 2; VI 139; VII 281, 282, 284, 286, 287; IX 70–75; XII 128, 129; XIII 171, 177; XV 2; XVIII 6; XIX 353

Tabit b. Kurra: XVIII 27–8
Talmud: V 118
Tatian: XX 45
Theagenes: VII 283; XVIII 6, 9, 23
Theandrites: III 195; IV 30; XVIII 7
Thecla, St: XI 273
θεῖος ἀνήρ: xv; XV *passim*; XVI *passim*
Themistius: VII 280; XI 277; XXI 11
Theodora, priestess: XVI 26
Theodora, pupil of Damascius: XVIII 5
Theodore, high priest: XVI 26
Theodoret: XII 130; XIII 156; XXI 11, 13
Theodosius I: X 61; XVIII 14
Theodosius II: XVIII 18; XX 32–3
Theophilus: IV 20; X 53; XIII 179; XVIII 14–15; XIX 355
Theosophia Tubingensis: XIX 353–4, 356
Theosebius: XVIII 10–11; XX 33–5, 45
Theoupolis (Antioch): XXI 14
Thoth, see Hermes Trismegistus
Timaeus: VI 134
Timaeus: V 128, 129; VI 136
Timotheus: XIX 356
Titianus, Fabius: XI 276

Uranius Antoninus: VI 131
'Uthman, caliph: V 127–8

Valens: IV 29; X 60; XI 274, 275
Valentinian I: XI 274, 275
Valentinian II: IV 22
Varsanuphios: X 62
Vettius Agorius Praetextatus: IV 22–4; XX 42
Vico, Giambattista: I 15
virtues in Neoplatonism: IV 28; XIII 175–7

Ward-Perkins, Bryan: I 12–13

Xenophanes: IX 63
xenos: I 6–7
Yahwe, see Jehovah

Zacharias of Gaza, Bishop of Mytilene: XIII 179; XIX 352–3, 356
Zagreus (Dionysos): VIII 367
Zarathustra, see Zoroaster
Zeno of Alexandria, Jewish apostate: XVIII 12; XX 33
Zeno of Citium: V 140
Zeno, emperor: XVIII 17, 19, 21
Zeno, iatrophilosopher: XVIII 13
Zenobia: XII 125
Zenodotus: VII 281; XVIII 5
Zervan: VIII 365, 366
Zeus: VIII 368; IX 67; XIII 169, 174
Zoroaster / Zoroastrianism: VI 136; XIII 170; XIV 238, 242, 248; 249–50; XVII 194
Zosimus: XVIII 3; XIX *passim.*